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My thesis proposal was to reanalyze secondary sources on the Spanish Civil War, review primary sources, sort out conflicting theories, and document a case for Stalin's most probable role in that war. This thesis provides alternate perspectives for further scholarly consideration.

A CASE FOR REEVALUATION OF STALIN'S ROLE IN  
THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

By

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Approved by

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## APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This thesis is directed to scholars of the Spanish Civil War. Acknowledging that the volume and depth of work already produced by respected scholars cannot be equaled in a thesis timeframe, I focus in on a few common theories to present a speculative, yet strong, case for reconsidering Stalin's role in the Spanish Civil War.

One proposition that should be reconsidered is that Stalin caused the Spanish Civil War. The internationally respected historian, Stanley Payne provided information to support what he contended is "...probably a more or less historically accurate judgement" that the Popular Front policy caused the war in Spain<sup>1</sup>. Stalin controlled the Communist International (Comintern) and in 1935 the Popular Front policy was adopted by the Comintern in Moscow. Both the Popular Front policy and Stalin were integrated into the Spanish government in the time preceding the Spanish Civil War. Stalin and the Popular Front policy did not help to avert civil war in Spain, but they did not cause it. There is sufficient information to acknowledge that the causes of Spanish Civil War had been building for many years and were mostly of Spanish origin.

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*. (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 259.

It is a known fact the Soviet Union provided aid to the Republican left in Spain during the civil war. Unfortunately for the Spanish left, Soviet “aid” included: Soviet “advisors” that undermined cohesiveness in the diverse groups that comprised the Spanish left, “advisors” who were maneuvered into many key positions in the Spanish left’s government and military, and enough military support to keep the Spanish left fighting but never enough for them to win. Military operations required communist, therefore Stalin’s, approval and support was withheld for military campaigns Stalin disagreed with. Those of the Spanish left who challenged Stalin’s authority in directing the civil war were dealt with severely. As the civil war dragged on, different Spaniards tried to no avail to reduce the power held over them by the Stalin-led communists. Stalin’s aid went far beyond providing support to become control. An old proverb of unclear origin seems to apply: “With friends like these, who needs enemies?”

Many historians contend that Stalin’s goal in Spain was not necessarily to support the Spanish left, but instead was contrived to manipulate Britain into intervening on behalf of the legally-elected Spanish left’s Republican government, thus dragging Britain into war. While Hiroaki Kuromiya explained that, “Stalin had hoped that his support of the Spanish Republicans would help to draw the major Western powers (Britain and France) and the Soviet Union closer together against Hitler’s Germany.”<sup>2</sup> Stanley Payne presented, “...further testimony to Stalin’s genuine belief that he could make his policy...compatible with...the Western democracies or at least with encouraging them to

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<sup>2</sup> Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin: Profiles in Power*, (Great Britain: Pearson Education Limited, 2005) 122.

change their policy toward the Republic.”<sup>3</sup> Data does not justify serious consideration of “...Stalin’s genuine belief...” that he could encourage Britain to change their policy toward the Spanish left’s Republican government.

Stalin’s specific motives and actions cannot be definitively determined due to a lack of access to his personal information combined with his effective preoccupation with secrecy.<sup>4</sup> “He demanded absolute security, ‘Death solves all problems. No man, no problem.’”<sup>5</sup> When Edvard Radzinsky was researching in the Soviet archives, he was warned that: “Bolshevik documents are peculiar in that wherever they say ‘peaceful demonstration’ they most probably mean ‘armed uprising,’ The general rule is that ‘yes’ almost invariably means ‘no’.” Radzinsky called this an “in-depth language –a false bottomed language, in which words have two or three meanings”<sup>6</sup> and continued on to explain that Stalin was a master at this language. If Radzinsky is correct, access to Stalin’s personal information might not provide the answers we seek; it might remain impossible to state with absolute certainty what Stalin’s actions and motives were.

Payne’s book, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*, reflects this uncertainty: “Orlov *may* first have been placed in charge of coordinating intelligence...Stalin *apparently* sent reports.... another top Soviet journalist...was

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<sup>3</sup> Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*. (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 194.

<sup>4</sup> Sergei Kudryashov, *Stalin and the Allies: Who Deceived Whom*, *History Today* 45, no. 2 (May 1995): page nr. Retrieved from <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/kudrya.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin: Profiles in Power*, (Great Britain: Pearson Education Limited, 2005) 128.

<sup>6</sup> Edvard Radzinsky, *Stalin*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1997), 103

*apparently* held back...” [emphasis added]<sup>7</sup> Possibilities were presented that, while speculative in nature, are reasonable and worth considering. The motives and goals suggested for Stalin in this thesis are likewise speculative, reasonable, and worthy of consideration.

A common theory is that Joseph Stalin apparently believed that if he could persuade Spain’s ‘uncontrollable’ left to let him guide the civil war, indefinitely postpone the social revolution so desired and deserved by Spanish workers, dismantle collectives designed to share wealth, restore property ownership back to those who originally ignored the plight of the workers and laborers, or forcibly eliminate “uncontrollable” elements and implement these changes himself, he could convince Britain to intervene on behalf of the Spanish left during the civil war. This theory is referenced by Spanish Civil War scholars as justification for many of Stalin’s ethically and morally questionable actions during the Spanish Civil War<sup>8</sup>.

On this subject, Payne accepts that, “To some of the more analytic scholars...Soviet policy seemed inevitably contradictory: How could a military intervention by the Soviet Union...really be expected to encourage the capitalist

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<sup>7</sup> Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*. (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 134-5.

<sup>8</sup> Burnett Bolloten, *The Grand camouflage*. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961), 100; Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish labyrinth*. (London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 324; W. G. Krivitsky, *I Was Stalin’s Spy*, (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 101; Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 296; Ronald Radosh, et al., *Spain betrayed*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 20.

democracies to join in on the same side? Strict logic is definitely against this proposition...”<sup>9</sup>

Payne is correct; logic does not support this proposition and archived reports presented in this thesis do not support it either. Spanish Civil War scholars should reject the idea that it was possible to encourage Britain to join in this war on the side of the Spanish left. Spanish military strategy during that time precluded intervening in the Spanish Civil War, especially on behalf of the Spanish left and significant foreign investors from both British and United States also opposed the Spanish left’s government, putting pressure on their governments to resolve their concerns.

Some researchers propose that the impossibility of convincing Britain to become involved in the Spanish Civil War is irrelevant because Stalin was unaware of this situation. The proposition states that what is relevant is that Stalin *believed* it was possible to pull the British into the Spanish Civil War. “From Stalin’s point of view there seemed to be a reasonable chance that a massive propaganda barrage...combined with some salutary political changes in Spain, might divert powerful Western interests...to focus instead on the geostrategic implications of German influence...”<sup>10</sup>.

Information presented in this thesis refutes this theory. From Stalin’s point-of-view there was no reasonable chance that a propaganda campaign combined with “...some salutary political changes...” would divert British interests. After reviewing information from diverse sources which are referenced in this thesis, it seems reasonable

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<sup>9</sup> Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*. (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 296

to conclude that Stalin was well aware of the fact that his actions in Spain could not possibly convince Britain to intervene on behalf of the Spanish left in this war.

Stalin also understood that Britain was aware of communist influence in Spain and this influence concerned them. He knew that there was no justification for his interference in the Spanish left's government, revolution, and war.

If we accept that Stalin knew he could not manipulate Britain into intervening in the Spanish Civil War, then we should also accept that Stalin's invasive and subversive "aid" to Spain was not provided with the goal of hiding communist influence in Spain or as part of a master plan to convince Britain to intervene to back the legally-elected Spanish left's government. If this were the case, why would Stalin put so much effort into pretending he believed in the possibility? What goals remain to explain Stalin's involvement in Spain? Did any countries gain from Stalin's "aid" to Spain during the civil war of 1936 –1939?

The Soviet Union also benefited financially from the tons of gold shipped there from Spain for safe keeping, which was never returned. Pretending to support the Spanish left was also a valuable ruse. If the Spanish left did not believe that Stalin could provide some extremely valuable resources, his efforts to manipulate the war by manipulating them would have quickly failed. Even with the "carrot" of possible British intervention continually dangled in front of them, many in the Spanish left immediately opposed

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<sup>10</sup> Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*. (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 296.

Stalin and other joined in the resistance as time passed and Stalin's "stick" tactics became less and less tolerable.

Britain benefited from the added length of the civil war since they were concerned about Mussolini. Military involvement in Spain's civil war drained Italy's resources, diverted Mussolini's attention away from activities Britain preferred he not be engaged in, and provided resistance to Stalin's growing power, which Britain feared more than Hitler's.

In addition to the Soviet Union and Britain, there was another country that benefited from Stalin's activities in Spain during Spanish Civil War: Germany. The fact that Stalin's aid was insufficient to allow the civil war to end but sufficient to keep the Spanish left fighting suited Hitler's strategic needs well. Hitler desired a prolonged civil war in Spain and even directed his German advisors in Spain to pressure Franco into changing tactics so the war would drag out rather than end it quickly<sup>11</sup>.

This thesis highlights Germany's activities in Spain along with Stalin and Hitler's relationship before and during the Spanish Civil War to persuade historians and history scholars to consider that assisting Germany might have been Stalin's most important goal in Spain.

In one section of Stanley Payne's book, Payne comments that "an entire literature" had been written to show that at the end of the civil war, the Communist withdrawal was planned by the Communists to shift blame for the final surrender away from the Soviet Union and Stalin. Payne dismisses this work with a comment that this

information is, “primarily in Spanish” and continues on to say that the last book to present this was written by a “...ninety-year-old Communist propaganda official who had become a vociferous anti-Communist”<sup>12</sup>. While this was probably not Payne’s intent, statements like this can give the impression of rejecting potentially relevant information by discrediting sources due to their nationality or age. This would be a grave mistake and one this thesis tries to avoid by allowing multiple voices to speak on this subject. Combining a variety of perspectives can assist in allowing patterns to appear that otherwise might not be apparent.

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<sup>11</sup> Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain* (London: Penguin Group, 1982), 223.

<sup>12</sup> Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*. (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 282



## CHAPTER II

### CAUSES OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

In ‘Dimitrov and Stalin 1934 – 1943’ edited by Alexander Daltin and F. I. Firsov, a telegram from Com. Ercoli stated that, “Besterio, (an extreme right Socialist), ... declared recently that the policy of the popular front had caused the war in Spain.”<sup>13</sup> Others, including Burnett Bolloten state that, “...the civil war was strictly Spanish in its Origin. No foreign intervention was necessary to ignite the tinder of social enmity...”<sup>14</sup>. As previously mentioned in the introduction, Stanley Payne believed it to be “more or less accurate” that policies of the Popular Front caused the war. While popular front policies might have aggravated a tense situation in Spain, they did not “cause” civil war to break out. Civil war was inevitable.

Conditions for the lower classes in Spain preceding the civil war varied in different regions, but many experienced sub-standard housing and food supplies that were at times so meager that some peasants were forced to resort to eating grass<sup>15</sup>. While many Spanish poor struggled to survive, the rich had both land and food. The code of the *hidalgo*, which required Spanish gentlemen to despise earning money increased the tension between social classes.

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<sup>13</sup> Alexander Dallin, and F.I. Firsov, *Dimitrov & Stalin 1934 – 1943, Letters from the Soviet Archives*, (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2000), 74.

<sup>14</sup> Burnett Bolloten, *The Grand camouflange*. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961), 26.

<sup>15</sup> Antony Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, (Penguin Books, 2001), 31.

This situation did not develop in the time just preceding the civil war. The 1788 Spanish census showed 50% of adult males were not involved in any type of productive work. The army, the church, and the nobility were a dead weight on the rest of the population<sup>16</sup>.

No governmental options existed for mediation between these groups to resolve an intolerable situation. Worker strikes were met with retaliatory mass executions.<sup>17</sup> One might assume that the Catholic Church in Spain would step in to represent the meek who were supposed to inherit the earth, but the opposite occurred. Spain's Catholic Church did little to reduce the misery, "The church was detested by the workers and labourers for preaching acceptance of poverty while amassing vast riches."<sup>18</sup>

A local historian in Palma Del Rio, Spain told a story to try to convey the tension that existed between the rich and poor in that area. According to this story, the poor in Palma Del Rio were starving or eating grass while the rich, including a bull rancher named Marino, lived in luxury. When the Popular Front won the elections, the peasants in this area believed they had the right to food. They went onto to Marino's ranch without his permission, killed some of his bulls (which were raised for bullfighting) and fed people in the town. Marino left Palma and later returned with the Franco's Nationalist army. Marino, with army backing, demanded that all men in town over the age of 16 line up along a narrow street near the Catholic convent. Marino walked down the line and pulled out some men out who worked for him or that he personally approved of. The rest

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<sup>16</sup> Antony Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, (Penguin Books, 2001), 14.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

of the men were forced in small groups to walk around the corner where they were all shot and dumped into a mass grave.

After the first execution, the remaining men realized they would be killed and begged Marino to spare them. His reply was, “You ate my meat.” One father was pulled out line by Marino only to look back and see his son remaining in the line. The father begged Marino not to kill his son so Marino kindly offered the father the option to die in his son’s place, which the father chose to do.

These families from extremely different social classes lived together in the town of Palma Del Rio long before the civil war and they live together there still. The lower classes had few choices before, during, or after the civil war. This story gives life to tension that raw data and facts alone cannot convey. Situations like this were common and were not caused by Stalin, the Spanish left’s government, or popular front policies.

Franz Borkenau traveled around Spain at the beginning of the civil war and published his impressions in the book, *The Spanish Cockpit*. Borkenau echoed Beever’s concerns about ‘intolerable conditions’ in Spain:

The Government must do something to satisfy the seething masses. But it attempted the dilatory policy of 1931 over again, unchanged: again there was a delay of the agrarian reform, again the guardia began shooting insurgent peasants. Only now the popular resistance was much stronger, feelings more bitter, claims more decided. In certain districts the peasants began to take the law into their own hands and to divide the large farms of the aristocrats between them.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>19</sup> Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish cockpit* (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, The University of Michigan Press, 1971), 60.

Neither Stalin, nor the Popular Front government's policies, caused the Spanish Civil War. There is sufficient documentation describing sub-standard living conditions and harsh treatment of the lower classes in Spain to conclude that the wide disparity between social classes nurtured long-standing desperation on one side combined with fear and indignation on the other that ultimately erupted in civil war. Perhaps, if the Catholic Church had been more successful in convincing the workers and labourers to accept poverty while watching others enjoy wealth, workers' and peasants' resistance might have been weaker, their feelings less bitter, their claims less decided.

Other contributing factors to the outbreak of Spain's civil war in 1936 were the rugged terrain combined with limited transportation routes and a weak central government. This combination led over time to the development of strong regional ties that were often stronger than ties to their national government. At the time of the Spanish Civil War, many people never traveled far from their homes and in difficult times had no one to turn to except their neighbors. Not all Spaniards spoke the same language. In conditions such as these it is understandable that the elected Spanish left's Republican government faced great difficulty in building and coordinating a national defense that could unite diverse groups and effectively discourage uprisings.

Regional ties are still apparent in Spain. A civil war town meeting was called in 2008 in a small Spanish town called Palma Del Rio, by "Izquierda Unida", a politically party supporting the Spanish left. One speaker at the meeting represented the "Izquierda Unida" and two other speakers supported the communist party. I attended, recorded the

meeting<sup>20</sup> and a native Spaniard translated it for me. The people at the meeting stated very strongly that they did not want outsiders telling their history – they want to tell it themselves.

The people who attended the meeting of the “Izquierda Unida” were correct – there is a uniquely Spanish element to the Spanish Civil War and this certainly applies to the causes of this war. While access to information was difficult for many years during Franco’s time, that situation has changed and many Spanish people want to research and talk about that time in their country’s history. More should be done to bring Spanish perspectives into historical debates and discussions regarding the Spanish Civil War.

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<sup>20</sup> Meeting of Izquierda Unida, October 2008, Palma del Rio, Spain, audio trans. Matias Garcia Avila.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **BRITISH STRATEGY**

One possibility proposed for why Britain might have intervened in the Spanish Civil War is that the British feared Hitler's growing power and might have been convinced to intervene in Spain to counter this growing danger. This idea is not supportable. When the Spanish Civil War broke out, the British and American governments were more concerned with the Soviet Union's growing power than they were with Germany's. The British considered Hitler a foreign leader that could provide a counter weight to offset Stalin's growing power.

Hitler himself supported this idea in his book Mein Kampf, which stated that Hitler's expansionist interests would be focused towards the east. If Britain weakened Hitler, they allowed Stalin to strengthen. If they allowed Hitler to become a powerful deterrent, Britain might be able to avoid political tension with Stalin and the Soviet Union would in turn weaken Hitler. In his book, Hitler expressed the wish to establish a relationship with Britain and the two countries had more in common than the Soviet Union and Britain. While the British feared a German invasion, they feared the communist threat more. The British would not have sided with Stalin to oppose Hitler. With regards to the situation in Spain, British military strategists' main concern was with maintaining Gibraltar.

In August 1936, one month after the murder of José Calvo Sotelo and the retaliatory military uprising, Britain's Committee of Imperial Defence documented their position on the resulting Spanish Civil War in a report by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee. In this report, they discussed 'British interests in the Western Mediterranean.

British interests around the Straits of Gibraltar revolved at that time around trade and communications – maintaining their naval base at Gibraltar was critical. An August 1936 report from the British Committee of Imperial Defence stated that:

...In a war with a European Power it would, therefore, be essential to our interests that Spain should be friendly, or at worst, strictly neutral. A hostile Spain or the occupation of Spanish territory by a hostile Power would make our control of the Straits and use of Gibraltar as a naval and air base extremely difficult, if not impossible, and would thus imperil Imperial communications by way of the Mediterranean...

5. Our interests in the present Spanish crisis may therefore be summarised as—

- (a) the maintenance of the Territorial integrity of Spain and her possessions (Balearics, Morocco, Canaries and Rio de Oro);
- (b) the maintenance of such relations with any Spanish Government that may emerge from this conflict as will ensure benevolent neutrality in the event of our being engaged in any European war.<sup>1</sup>

Britain defined their strategic course at the onset of the Spanish Civil War as working to ensure 'friendly relations' with 'any Spanish Government that may emerge.' British support for the losing side in this conflict would pit them against a victorious

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<sup>1</sup> Report 24-264, Report of the committee of imperial defence – august 1936 (British National Archives, Reproduced from photographic copies in The National Archives of original letters preserved in the Royal Archives and made available by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen, Parliamentary Licence number for reproduction: P2010000166, 1936), Retrieved from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> doi: CAB 24-264.

enemy after the war and since this was not a viable option, Britain could not allow herself the option of choosing to intervene militarily on behalf of either side in this war. The August 1936 report also laid down a requirement that, 'Spain is under an obligation not to cede any of her rights in her sphere of influence in Morocco to another Power.'

The Committee of Imperial Defence's report continued with a discussion of Italy's involvement in the civil war. The defense committee was concerned that Italy might attempt to occupy some part of the Spanish Peninsula, but they justified their entrenched position regarding non-involvement in the conflict with a stated belief that Spanish pride would make long-term domination by any possible Italian occupation unlikely. Based on this committee report, if Stalin used propaganda regarding imminent Italian occupation as leverage to pull a reluctant Britain into military intervention in Spain, his tactic would have been ineffective.

The August 1936 Committee of Imperial Defence report, reproduced and included in Appendix A, went on to explain other critical reasons why Britain could not be persuaded to change her mind on the issue of intervening in the Spanish Civil War:

Mussolini, if determined to exploit the Spanish crisis to his own advantage, will not be deterred by threats, and only, by the certainty that force, and adequate force, will be employed against him. We are, therefore, driven to the conclusion that any action, other than action in the diplomatic sphere, which His Majesty's Government might take which would effectively thwart his designs, must inevitably involve a serious risk of war between Great Britain and Italy.



... The relative preparedness for war of these two countries has been examined so exhaustively during the past twelve months that it is unnecessary in this paper to reconsider the question in any detail. Suffice it to say that Italy is the only Power whose forces are fully mobilised and available for immediate operations.<sup>2</sup>

Britain knew that Italy would respond militarily if the British stepped into the Spanish conflict. The result would be open war with Italy and the Committee for Imperial Defence's report clearly shows that the British were all too aware of how ill prepared they were for such a eventuality:

...we should avoid at all costs the possibility of becoming involved in action which, on the one hand, fails to achieve our object, and, on the other hand, tends further to alienate Italy, *i.e.*, we should take no action which we are not prepared to back up by all the force at our command... the courses of action that appear advisable are... press for the conclusion and rigid enforcement of a universal agreement of non-interference in Spain by all European Powers... Support by France and Russia to the forces of the Spanish Left may well lead Italy to afford open support to General Franco.<sup>3</sup>

The report therefore counters the claim that Stalin ruthlessly controlled the Spanish left to hide Soviet involvement in Spain. The report established that in August 1936 – only one month after the Spanish Civil War began, Russia's involvement in Spain was both a known fact and a concern. Instead of hiding Soviet involvement, Stalin's

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<sup>2</sup> Report 24-264, Report of the committee of imperial defence – august 1936 (British National Archives, Reproduced from photographic copies in The National Archives of original letters preserved in the Royal Archives and made available by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen, Parliamentary Licence number for reproduction: P2010000166, 1936), Retrieved from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> doi: CAB 24-264.

<sup>3</sup> Report 24-264, Report of the committee of imperial defence – august 1936 (British National Archives, Reproduced from photographic copies in The National Archives of original letters preserved in the Royal Archives and made available by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen, Parliamentary Licence number for reproduction: P2010000166, 1936), Retrieved from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> doi: CAB 24-264.

“aid” to the Spanish left helped Franco convince many in the international community to help him fight what many considered pernicious communist infiltration in Spain.<sup>4</sup>

The report proves that Britain knew that if they chose to intervene in Spain’s civil war, they would be forced to confront Italian military forces and in such an eventuality, the British would lose. Britain’s primary concern was not whether the Spanish situation might require them to jump into the fray; they were concerned with how to discourage increased international involvement in this conflict. This goal could not be achieved with additional British intervention of any kind, but instead by “rigid” strategic non-intervention while knowingly downplaying the obvious Italian military presence in Spain. The legally elected Spanish government could be, and would be sacrificed to give the British time to prepare for war; Stalin was not considered as a potential ally; he was viewed a complication in the fine art of avoiding premature war.

In the fall of 1936, a few months into the civil war, the Spanish left’s legal government and its Spanish electorate struggled against odds for survival. The British Committee of Imperial Defence met, discussed the situation, and issued another secret report expressing British acquiescence to the Spanish left’s eventual defeat and debating whether they should begin negotiating with Franco. In the Committee of Imperial Defence October 30, 1936 report, under the topic of “Gibraltar as a Link in Imperial Air Communication,” Sir Robert Vansittart discussed how to proceed on additional construction activities at Gibraltar:

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<sup>4</sup> Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain* (London: Penguin Group, 1982), 223.

...the matter should, in any case, be referred to the Cabinet, owing to the political issues involved. It was highly probable that a Government led by General Franco would emerge triumphant from the Civil War, and such a Government would undoubtedly object to the scheme. It was to be expected that Italy would actively support them in their objections. He felt, therefore, that it would be better to try to come to some arrangement with General Franco's Government than to be taken to court over the matter...

...SIR ROBERT VANSITTART stressed the probability of avoiding delay if we waited until the Franco Government was established in Spain. General Franco would, no doubt, want to obtain our assistance and support in many matters, and it would be a good opportunity to say to him that we were proposing to proceed with the reclamation scheme then.

SIR SAMUEL HOARE enquired what would happen supposing General Franco made difficulties. He trusted that this would not mean abandoning the whole scheme...

The meeting's report ended with conclusions included the following:

- (e) That the best method of carrying through the scheme, whether by proceeding at once without any reference to Spain or by waiting to negotiate with whatever Spanish Government emerges from the present Civil War, is a question of policy which can only be decided by the Cabinet.<sup>5</sup>

This report, reproduced and included in Appendix B, shows that the British Committee of Imperial Defence, as early as October 1936, believed that General Franco was more likely to win the civil war than the government of the Spanish left. The committee was not just discussing the possibility of a Franco victory; they were already debating how to negotiate with Franco's future government. It has already been shown

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<sup>5</sup> Report 24-265, Report of the committee of imperial defence – October 29 1936 (British National Archives, Reproduced from photographic copies in The National Archives of original letters preserved in the Royal Archives and made available by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen (Parliamentary Licence number for reproduction: P2010000166, 1936). Retrieved from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> doi: CAB 24-265

that Britain thought it imperative to be friendly with ‘whatever Spanish Government emerges from the present Civil War’—this October 1936 report presents Britain belief that Franco would lead that emergent government. No amount of governmental restructuring from Stalin could make the Spanish left a viable ally to the British during this war. The British could not allow themselves to be convinced to consider supporting the Spanish left against Franco.

Not only did Britain reject the idea of considering aligning with the losing side in this war, they did not prefer for the war to end quickly. Continuation of the Spanish Civil War benefited the British by providing a diversionary tactic that kept Italy from having sufficient resources to become a threat in other, more strategically important, areas around the Mediterranean. In the British Committee of Imperial Defence October 1937 report, *Situation in the Mediterranean and the Middle East*, British military leaders discussed concerns over the possibility an attack on Egypt by Italian forces. The British Chiefs of Staff Subcommittee expressed confidence that Italy’s involvement in the Spanish Civil War drained Italy’s resources to a point that it would be unlikely for Mussolini to attack Egypt. The British would not have intervened to hamper Italy’s expensive war effort in Spain.

While the information provided in this thesis already provides a strong case against Stalin’s ability to convince the British to support the Spanish left during the civil war, there is more supporting evidence.

The October 1937 Committee of Imperial Defense report, *Situation in the Mediterranean and the Middle East*, reproduced and included in Appendix C, continues

on to provide additional justification for accepting this thesis's proposition that Britain could not get involved in a confrontation in the Mediterranean area:

- (v) The despatch of any forces from this country must inevitably weaken our position *vis-a-vis* Germany, and we have always considered that we should take no action which would result in a diversion of our limited resources from our main objective, which is the security of this country against German aggression.<sup>6</sup>

Just as the British military strategists calculated that involvement in the Spanish Civil War would drain Mussolini's resources, this report shows that the British were also very aware that any involvement in Spain would be a drain on their own time and resources as well. Germany was growing more aggressive and they could not afford the luxury of spending valuable time on what they had already determined was a lost cause. They could not afford to shift limited British resources away from building up their own country's critical defense systems. Stalin's manipulation of the Spanish left's political parties, government, and military defense could not alter the basic truth of these facts.

Not only did the British government reject the idea of intervening on behalf of the Spanish left, they tried to avoid calling attention to Italy's involvement in Spain's civil war. The British government concluded that calling attention to Italy's involvement in Spain could endanger the formal non-intervention agreement.<sup>7</sup> The British feared a confrontation with Mussolini and were not willing to risk an early military conflict with

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<sup>6</sup> Report 24-272. Report of the committee of imperial defence – October 1937 (British National Archives, Reproduced from photographic copies in The National Archives of original letters preserved in the Royal Archives and made available by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen (Parliamentary Licence number for reproduction: P2010000166, 1937), Retrieved from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> doi: CAB 24-272

<sup>7</sup> Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain*, (London: Penguin Group, 1982), 291.

Italy to support the Spanish left, especially since they had already concluded that the left would eventually lose the war anyway. Non-intervention decreased the Spanish left's ability to defend their government, but it had no deleterious effects on Britain and, as long as international attention was not drawn to Italian involvement, it provided no military complications and no hindrance to Franco's ability to get foreign military aid.

In mid 1937, the Spanish Civil War was nearly at its mid point. The Committee of Imperial Defence's report dated July 1937<sup>8</sup> continued discussion of Britain's defensive limitations and the impossibility of fighting all enemies everywhere. The committee reiterated how critical it was for Britain to set economic priorities focusing only on preparation for an inevitable direct attack on the United Kingdom by Germany.

In their November 1937 report, the defence committee admonished Britain to keep to their narrow strategic focus on Britain's own preparations for response to German air attacks and expressed consternation that the strength of Britain's air force was "seriously below" what calculations indicated was necessary for their own defense<sup>9</sup>.

The April 1938 report from this committee continued to hammer out this same line of reasoning by strongly advising against Britain even participating in conversations regarding the possibility of involvement in war in other nations regardless of whether

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<sup>8</sup> Report 24-270. Report of the committee of imperial defence – July 1937 (British National Archives, Reproduced from photographic copies in The National Archives of original letters preserved in the Royal Archives and made available by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen (Parliamentary Licence number for reproduction: P2010000166, 1937), Retrieved from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> doi: CAB 24-270.

<sup>9</sup> Report 24-273. Report of the committee of imperial defence – November 1937 (British National Archives, Reproduced from photographic copies in The National Archives of original letters preserved in the Royal Archives and made available by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen (Parliamentary Licence number for reproduction: P2010000166, 1937). Retrieved from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> doi: CAB 24-273.

those nations were potential enemies or allies. The committee recommended that British diplomats state this position gently to France to “...avoid giving a rebuff...”<sup>10</sup> but strongly advised against giving France or any other country any indication that Britain could become involved in any another nation’s conflicts. British strategy of non-intervention in the plight of other countries in order to ensure their own country’s survival continued in the Committee of Imperial Defence’s report issued in October 1938<sup>11</sup>.

These reports leave no room for ambiguity regarding Britain’s position on the Spanish Civil War. Britain was not considering becoming involved in the Civil War in Spain – not at the beginning of the civil war, not in the middle of that war, and not towards the end.

Many historians claim that if the Spanish left’s various dissenting political groups could be manipulated, combined, or liquidated to achieve consolidated political power under Stalin’s control, these changes might have altered Britain’s perception of the Spanish Left’s government enough to convince the British to intervene in the Spanish Civil War. As shown in this chapter, this belief is not supported by historical evidence.

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<sup>10</sup> Report 24-276. Report of the committee of imperial defence – April 1938 (British National Archives, Reproduced from photographic copies in The National Archives of original letters preserved in the Royal Archives and made available by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen (Parliamentary Licence number for reproduction: P2010000166, 1938). Retrieved from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> doi: CAB 24-276.

<sup>11</sup> Report 24-279. Report of the committee of imperial defence – October 1938. (British National Archives, Reproduced from photographic copies in The National Archives of original letters preserved in the Royal Archives and made available by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen (Parliamentary Licence number for reproduction: P2010000166, 1938), Retrieved from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> doi: CAB 24-279.

The reports previously quoted provide strong support for this thesis's position that it would be a worthwhile exercise to undertake a reevaluation of Stalin's involvement after setting this claim aside.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FOREIGN INVESTORS**

When Spanish workers, laborers, and idealists decided to begin a social revolution against the wealthy in Spain, they pitted themselves against Spanish-owned businesses. . One Spanish millionaire, Juan March, fled Spain and invested in helping Franco's insurgents overthrow the elected Spanish left's government<sup>12</sup>. The Spanish left also alienated foreign countries with investments in Spain they wished to protect.

Even before the civil war began, Spain's unstable economy was a source of irritation to international capitalists. The Spanish left's government nationalized many businesses, so private ownership and investment in businesses declined. International businesses, including those in Britain and the United States, were frustrated with continual difficulties in attempting to negotiate a stable business environment with the elected government. Franco provided more stability and Germany was considered capitalistic. Many of these foreign investors turned away from the elected Spanish government and overtly or covertly supported Franco's nationalist uprising. The president of the Texas Oil Company diverted five tankers to Franco-controlled ports. Standard Oil of New Jersey supported Franco, as did Ford, Studebaker, Dupont, and

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<sup>12</sup> Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain*, (London: Penguin Group, 1982), 39, 138.

General Motors. Covert methods of support to Franco included disrupting trade and delaying bank credit<sup>10</sup>.

In his working paper, *International Capital before "capital internationalization" in Spain, 1936-1959*, Julio Tascón presented data on foreign investments in Spain.

According to Tascón, when the Spanish Civil War began, Germany had ‘foreign interest’ in Spanish banks, telegraph and electricity, chemicals, explosives, shipbuilding and mines.<sup>13</sup> In 1933, with the rise of the Nazi government, Germany’s investments in Spain increased due to their need for a continuing supply of raw material imports.<sup>14</sup> The Spanish left’s movement towards collectivization conflicted with Hitler’s national interests in Spain and plans for rebuilding, and rearming Germany would have influenced Hitler’s immediate decision to provide military support for the Spanish-right insurgents.

It is significant to note that later, even after representatives of British companies in Spain called their government’s attention to the fact that Germany was ensuring that Germany received the all Spanish raw materials they needed to prepare for war while effectively blocking Britain’s ability to acquire enough of the same raw materials to meet

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<sup>13</sup> Julio Tascón, *International Capital before "capital internationalization" in Spain, 1936-1959*, Center for European Studies Working Paper No. 79, Departamento de Economía Universidad de Oviedo 33071 Oviedo, Spain, n.d.)

<sup>14</sup> US Civilian Agency Records RG 84. State Department and Foreign Affairs Records -- Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State (RG 84) Spain. (U.S. National Archives. n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.archives.gov/research/holocaust/finding-aid/civilian/rg-84-spain.html> doi: RG 84.

British needs for military preparation, the British government still refused to respond in Spain with a show of military force.<sup>15</sup>

While the British Committee for Imperial Defence was concerned about Germany, many of the British bourgeoisie were initially comfortable with the idea of Germany rearming because they assumed Germany would ‘direct their aggressiveness against the Soviet Union.’<sup>16</sup> Sumner Wells, U.S. Secretary in 1937, wrote later that American financial and commercial interests at that time viewed a confrontation between Germany and Russia as “favorable” to U.S. interests by defeating Russia and weakening Germany.<sup>17</sup> Based on this information, Stalin could not have used a fear of Germany’s rearming to tip the scales in British decisions to avoid involvement in the Spanish Civil War.

British holdings in Spain included natural resources (such as Rio Tinto), manufacturing, and utilities. U.S. companies in Spain included ITT. Douglas Little clearly outlined how U. S. and British companies grew increasingly concerned with the Spanish left’s restrictive and inconsistent government policies, lack of control, and acceptance of interference directed from Moscow. Concerns were raised in late 1930 and continued up to and beyond the beginning of the civil war. These concerns included, but were not limited to: excessive tariffs, export obstacles, unreasonable regulations,

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<sup>15</sup> Memo CAB 24-268. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs – March 1937 (British National Archives, Reproduced from photographic copies in The National Archives of original letters preserved in the Royal Archives and made available by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen (Parliamentary Licence number for reproduction: P2010000166, 1937). Retrieved from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> doi: CAB 24-268.

<sup>16</sup> Burnett Bolloten, *The Grand camouflange*. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961), 94.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

expropriations without adequate indemnification, and possible soviet subversion of the Spanish left's government, and worker-caused stoppages.<sup>18</sup> In August 1936, strikers killed the Spanish directors of some companies<sup>19</sup> and while no foreign directors were mentioned, the instability in Spain under the Spanish-left government was of international concern.

These complicated foreign interests in Spain precluded Stalin from convincing Britain to intervene on behalf of the Spanish left government; British intervention would have placed Britain in conflict with Germany, a country they were not yet willing or able to confront. Intervention on behalf of the Spanish left in the civil war would have strained relations with the U.S. government, U.S. corporations, and Britain's own corporations. Since Britain was suspicious of Communist subversion in the Spanish left's government and had little to no confidence in that government's ability to control diverse elements in their country or conduct reliable business agreements, there was very little to gain and much to lose by such an action.

Rather than debating whether to support the elected government, there is reason to believe that the British Rio Tinto company might actually have aided Franco's rebels. The chief of the rebel air force claimed that the American Telegraph company aided the Franco rebels by setting up communication links between Madrid and Franco in the Canary Islands<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Douglas Little, *Malevolent Neutrality*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1985),

<sup>19</sup> Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish cockpit* (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, The University of Michigan Press, 1971), 75.

<sup>20</sup> Douglas Little, *Malevolent Neutrality*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 214.

## CHAPTER V

### SOVIET SPIES IN BRITAIN

Is it probable that, even if it were not possible to persuade Britain to intervene in the Spanish Civil War, Stalin continued believe in the feasibility of this goal because his belief was based on limited British military intelligence information he had in his possession? Obviously, since the British Committee of Imperial Defence reports were highly secret, they were not commonly available. This scenario is not probable because evidence supports this thesis's contention that Stalin had access to secret Committee of Imperial Defence reports.

Stalin made a comment in meeting of the Politburo in late August 1936, "A friendly Spain was vital to Paris and London."<sup>21</sup> Stalin's choice of words echo similar statements contained in a Committee of Imperial Defence report: "Our position at Gibraltar has for many years been based on a continuation of friendly relations with Spain. Apart from the risk of any foreign intervention, should a Government inimical to Britain, whether Fascist or Communist, emerge from the present struggle, the question of the security of our base at Gibraltar will require serious examination."<sup>22</sup> In August 1936,

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<sup>21</sup> W. G. Krivitsky, *I Was Stalin's Spy*, (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 98

<sup>22</sup> Report 24-264, Report of the committee of imperial defence – august 1936 (British National Archives, Reproduced from photographic copies in The National Archives of original letters preserved in the Royal Archives and made available by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen, Parliamentary Licence number for reproduction: P2010000166, 1936), Retrieved from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> doi: CAB 24-264

just a few months after the civil war began, Stalin apparently knew that Britain needed a friendly Spain.

Donald Duart Maclean was an infamous soviet spy, part of the “Cambridge Five” who worked in the British foreign office. British secret service archive information KV-2-805, *Information Obtained From General Krivitsky During His Visit to this Country, January – February 1940*, states that:

From his description of photographic prints of documents he saw in Moscow on two or three occasions in 1936 and 1937 there is no doubt that printed reports of the Committee of Imperial Defence and other highly confidential reports available to the same source were regularly made available to and photographed by OGPU agents in London...Reports supplied by the ‘Imperial Council’ source were specially dealt with in Moscow. The printed report...was translated literally into Russian.<sup>23</sup>

While Krivitsky has been rejected by some as an unreliable source, some of his questionable allegations have been shown to be accurate, based on declassified soviet archival documents.<sup>24</sup> Also noteworthy is that the United States Central Intelligence Agency’s website, listing books of interest to intelligence professions along with book reviews, included this comment in a review provided by Hayden B. Peake, curator of the CIA’s historical Intelligence Collection on a book by Gary Kern on Krivitsky: “... the FBI declined to investigate his [Krivitsky’s] counterintelligence claims. Had they done

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<sup>23</sup> Secret Service File KV 2/805. Security Service: Personal (PF Series) Files – Soviet Intelligence Officers, Walter J. KRIVITSKY. (British National Archives, Reproduced from photographic copies in The National Archives of original letters preserved in the Royal Archives and made available by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen (Parliamentary Licence number for reproduction: P2010000166, 1936), Retrieved from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> doi: KV 2/805

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War*, (Gutenberg-e, Columbia University Press, n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.gutenberg-e.org/kod01/frames/fkod04.html>, Appendix A.

so, Alger Hiss, the atom spies, the Cambridge Five, and many other moles in our government, all of whom were neutralized after the war—would have been identified...’<sup>25</sup>

The British secret service found much of the information provided to them by Krivitsky reliable and useful. They did not blindly take Krivitsky’s word for truth without verification; they compared Krivitsky’s description of the documents to the actual reports. The British Archives’ Security Service file on Krivitsky includes a document containing the following comment on Krivitsky, “We are satisfied that KRIVITSKY’s statements are true and made in good faith...H.M.G. Jebb, Esq., Foreign Office.”<sup>26</sup>

Another document in the British Secret Service file on Krivitsky stated that:

In the autumn of 1939 ...M.I.5. were reopening investigations into the activities in this country of a known Soviet agent, a Dutchman living at the Hague. These investigations had progressed so far that it appeared that in 1936 this Dutchman was closely associated with certain Foreign Office officials from whom he was receiving secret documents from which he made photographic copies for transmission to Moscow...<sup>27</sup>

The British Secret Service and British Foreign office both documented the fact that soviet spies regularly sent reports of the British Committee of Imperial Defence to

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<sup>25</sup> Hayden B. Peake, *Intelligence in Recent Public Literature - The Intelligence Officer’s Bookshelf – Review*, CIA Historical Intelligence Collection, 2008). Retrieved from [https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol49no4/Bookshelf\\_11.htm](https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol49no4/Bookshelf_11.htm)

<sup>26</sup> Secret Service File KV 2/805. Security Service: Personal (PF Series) Files – Soviet Intelligence Officers, Walter J. KRIVITSKY. (British National Archives, Reproduced from photographic copies in The National Archives of original letters preserved in the Royal Archives and made available by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen (Parliamentary Licence number for reproduction: P2010000166, 1936), Retrieved from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> doi: KV 2/805.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Stalin in 1936 and 1937. Based on their expertise in this area and their belief in the accuracy of the information provided, it is a reasonable proposition that Stalin had copies of the reports discussing Britain's position on the Spanish Civil War.

British archives show that soviet spies had infiltrated their foreign office. According to information published on the website of ABC-CLIO, Donald Duart Maclean began working at British Foreign Office in 1934 and continued to work there as a soviet spy in the foreign office until 1951, well past the end of the Spanish Civil War<sup>28</sup>. Maclean was known to have been a Soviet spy during the time of the Spanish Civil War. He sympathized with the Spanish left and would have known that Britain had no plans to come to their aid.

Soviet spies regularly sent British Committee of Imperial Defence reports to Stalin in 1936 and 1937. In 1938, British Cabinet meeting minutes documented concerns over their awareness of possible leakage of British military weakness and planning information to their enemies.<sup>29</sup>

Information in the British Committee of Imperial Defence reports during this time also described Britain's position on the Spanish Civil War and why they could not intervene, especially on behalf of the Spanish left's Republican government.

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<sup>28</sup> ABC-CLIO, *Maclean, Donald (1913–1983)*, (ABC-CLIO, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www.historyandtheheadlines.abc-clio.com/ContentPages/ContentPage.aspx?entryId=1162466&currentSection=1130228&productid=4>

<sup>29</sup> Report 24-276. Report of the committee of imperial defence – April 1938 (British National Archives, Reproduced from photographic copies in The National Archives of original letters preserved in the Royal Archives and made available by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen (Parliamentary Licence number for reproduction: P2010000166, 1938). Retrieved from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> doi: CAB 24-276.



It should be kept in mind that Stalin would have also understood the value of having access to information that the British believed was secret. Since the British documents were believed to be 'secret', the Spanish Left would not be aware of Britain's position and the British were unlikely to correct any statements made by Stalin regarding British strategy in Spain for fear of 'showing their hand' or divulging secret information. Stalin could freely make claims that if the Spanish left allowed him to derail their revolution and manipulate their civil war, Stalin might be able to persuade the British to intervene on their behalf – no one would dare to correct him.

Some contend that even if Stalin knew Britain could not be convinced to intervene on behalf of the Spanish left, he would have ignored the evidence and continued plotting to find a way to convince them anyway. From the perspective of United States Army historians this is highly unlikely. The following is an excerpt from a military book on the operational art of war:

Soviet Army theorists and practitioners sought systematic explanations for the complexities underlying victory and defeat in modern war. Armed with an ideology that emphasized theory and scientific method in military affairs, they brought new perspective to the study of military history and refreshing rigor to views on the nature of possible future war, including the conduct of operations. By the late 1920s they had emerged with an altered view of the constituent components of military art, and it is to this period—a golden age of military thought—that we owe the origins of our basic understanding of operational art...

Although the Soviets did not ignore other operational issues, the theory and practice of deep operations occupied center stage for Soviet operational art during the 1930s. Operational art required the practitioner to:

- Identify strategic objectives within theater.
- Visualize a theater in three dimensions.
- Determine what sequence of military actions-preparation, organization, support, battles, and command arrangements-would bring the attainment of those objectives.

...The Soviets were distinctive for the following reasons: ...They worried obsessively about linking separate aspects of their thought about the changing nature of operations to larger and smaller military realities.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, according to United States military historians, Stalin was not naïve when the Spanish Civil War began. At that moment in time, Stalin was experiencing a “golden age of military thought” when he would have obsessively plotted to link Soviet military strategy to the military realities in the area of military conflict. The Soviet Army suffered from the purges, but the Soviet military strategists were purged *after* their involvement in the Spanish Civil War, “Soviet operational maneuver concepts and forces suffered severe damage in the late 1930s, in part because Stalin purged their creators.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Bruce W. Menning, *Introduction to Historical Perspectives on the Operational Art*, ed. Michael D. Krause and R. Cody Phillips (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army., 2007) Retrieved from <http://www.history.army.mil/books/OpArt/introduction.htm>

<sup>31</sup> David M. Glantz, Soviet Operational Art Since 1936, *Historical Perspectives on the Operational Art*, Michael D. Krause and R. Cody Phillips, (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army., 2007) Retrieved from <http://www.history.army.mil/books/OpArt/russia3.htm>

Khrushchev repeated this claim in his Secret Speech delivered at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on February 25, 1956: “...the cadre of leaders who had gained military experience in Spain and in the Far East was almost completely liquidated...”<sup>32</sup> These leaders were militarily involved in the Spanish Civil War, gained experience there, and *then* were purged. Stalin used and benefited from Soviet military strategists’ knowledge and expertise during Spain’s civil war.

If these U.S. Army historians were correct, Stalin would not have blindly ignored secret intelligence reports that conclusively proved that the British could not be convinced to intervene on behalf of the Spanish left in their civil war.

Stalin’s involvement in the Spanish Civil War should to be reevaluated after eliminating the assumption that Stalin believed he could convince Britain to intervene in this war. Then, with these blinders off, new possibilities regarding Stalin’s role in the Spanish Civil War become more open to discussion and debate.

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<sup>32</sup> Nikita S Khrushchev, *Modern History Sourcebook: Nikita S. Khrushchev: The Secret Speech - On the Cult of Personality, 1956* (New York: Fordham University 1998) Retrieved from <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1956khrushchev-secret1.html>

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **RESPONSE TO THE 1936 MILITARY UPRISING**

When the Spanish Civil War broke out in July 1936, the Spanish workers needed and expected government action but they were to be disappointed. The government of the Spanish left delayed attempts to put the rebellion down, preferring to negotiate to avoid a civil war. In many cases, even after it was clear that civil war could not be avoided, the Spanish government refused to arm the those who had voted for the government.

Reports on the early days of the Spanish Civil War often describe unrestrained workers racing around madly, searching cars and strangers for possible weapons. These descriptions give the impression of a group of crazed people acting without reason or ethics. In *The Spanish Civil War*, Abel Paz, who was one of those workers, presents the events at the beginning of the civil war from the workers' perspective:

Ever since the victory of the united left wing in the parliamentary elections of February 1936, the tramp of jackboots had been getting closer. But the government appeared to be trying not to notice. It gave the impression of being more scared of the workers than the military. As a result, many of those present were convinced that neither the Madrid government nor the Generalitat in Catalonia would arm the workers. If we were unarmed, it would be a massacre; if we made no effort to resist, the result would be the same anyway. If we were going to die – or so the word went around – it was better to die fighting...

The message given to the comrades assembled there was this: that the government refused to arm the people, and that, as the critical confrontation was certain to take place that very night, everyone was to arm himself as best he could, by raiding gun stores or by any other means.<sup>33</sup>

Paz's perspective on the reaction of the government was shared by José Peirats, a member of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI), "The government either lacked arms or feared to arm the people."<sup>34</sup> Justifiably terrified workers were abandoned by their elected governmental leaders at the critical moment.

If Stalin wanted to effectively assist the Spanish Republic, this was the moment to step in and provide some advice and arms, but Stalin was silent. Paz describes directions coming from within the CNT (the AnarchoSyndicalist labor organization)<sup>35</sup>, which would help to explain the continued resistance experienced later when the government, under Stalin's direction, attempted to consolidate diverse group, including the CNT under centralized government control. Once again local workers were given more protection and direction from their local labor organizations than from their centralized government.

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<sup>33</sup> Abel Paz, *The Spanish Civil War* (Paris: Hazan, 1997), 9,15.

<sup>34</sup> José Peirats, *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1974), 105.

<sup>35</sup> Abel Paz, *The Spanish Civil War* (Paris: Hazan, 1997), 9.

## CHAPTER VII

### STALIN'S AID TO SPAIN

After the time for immediate, decisive, effective action had passed, Stalin agreed to provide assistance to the elected Spanish government.<sup>1</sup> Stories vary to some degree, but converge along the line that Stalin's decision to support the Spanish left 'coincided' with the left's decision to send tons of gold to Russia for safekeeping and for ensuring the ability to purchase arms from Russia. What the Spanish left purchased with this gold was a prolonged agonizing war. Even General Franco commented on the deceptive situation in early January 1938:

Do the songs of the mermaids in the red zone say nothing to you? Do you not foresee the false voices of compassion and fellowship? Does it not cause you alarm the apparent patriotism of the new red propaganda? Do you not see in it the criminal effort to drag to death your conquered youth and new artifact to deceive the world?<sup>2</sup>

While Franco was not shy about using the media for propaganda campaigns, his hatred of Communism was sincere and justified.

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Alba, and Steven Schwartz, *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism*, (New Brunswick & Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988), 159.

<sup>2</sup> Franco, *Palabras del Caudillo, 19 April 1937 – 31 Diciembre 1938*, Trans. Matias Garcia Avila and Kristine Pelletier Garcia (Editora Nacional, 1939), 137.

There are many examples of how the arms Stalin supplied to Spain in exchange for gold were over-priced.<sup>3</sup> Arms shipments were also sporadic, arms were often obsolete,<sup>4</sup> weapons were shared unequally between Communist and non-communist groups,<sup>5</sup> weapons varied in munitions requirements so munitions of varying caliber were required, and some weapons were missing pieces (such as rifles with no bolts). It has been claimed that largest shipments of arms from the Soviet Union were received in Spain in autumn of 1936. It has also been said that arms received by the Spanish in the autumn and winter of 1936 –37 were of ‘limited utility’<sup>6</sup>. If both of these statements are true, then it appears that the largest shipments of arms from the Soviet Union were of limited utility. These are not the actions of a country with serious intentions to help the Republicans win the civil war.

Once Soviet “advisors” were placed in key positions in the Spanish government and military, Stalin was accused of not taking the risks needed to end the war, of encouraging dissention between the different factions in the Spanish left thus reducing the left’s military effectiveness, of refusing support for military missions that might have been effective, and of prolonging the war.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War* (Gutenberg-e, Columbia University Press. n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.gutenberg-e.org/kod01/frames/fkod04.html>; Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 157

<sup>4</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 156

<sup>5</sup> Victor Alba, and Steven Schwartz, *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism*, (New Brunswick & Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988), 153

<sup>6</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 154–157

When one Spanish leader, Prieto, planned a military mission that Stalin disagreed with, “It was later rumored that orders had been given [from Stalin] to liquidate Prieto if he persisted.”<sup>8</sup> The Soviets build prisons in Spain where troublemakers were sent, including some of the famous international brigades volunteers. Some of the international volunteers who died in Spain were not killed by Franco-led insurgents. They were instead killed by the country that came to “aid” the Spanish left’s government – the Soviet Union led by Stalin. Passports from those who were killed were collected and later used by the Soviets.<sup>9</sup>

Stalin’s strategy involving “aid” to the Spanish left was continued even after the Spanish left no longer wanted Soviet aid and was well past the point of preferring surrender to continued war. Some refer to actions such as these as constituting Stalin’s ‘counterrevolution’ while others refute that term. Whatever term is applied to Stalin’s Spanish Civil War strategy, it was clearly ineffective in regards to helping the elected government of Spain win the civil war.

When the justification of attempting to manipulate military events to position Spain for British intervention is removed, determining Stalin’s motivation for these actions requires more analysis. If Stalin did not care if the Spanish left won the war, why prolong it? Perhaps the time gained by prolonging the Spanish Civil War was being used productively elsewhere.

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<sup>7</sup> Victor Alba, and Steven Schwartz, *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism*, (New Brunswick & Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988), 159

<sup>8</sup> Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain* (London: Penguin Group, 1982), 288).

<sup>9</sup> Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*, (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 205-206.



Payne contends that at one point in the civil war, ‘...the Soviet Union became momentarily interested in playing the Moroccan card in order to gain British and French assistance...the Soviets strove to persuade Alvarez del Vayo that it might be useful to cede the Moroccan protectorate to Britain and France in return for their action to en the German and Italian intervention.’<sup>10</sup> This would seem a reasonable strategy except that Stalin’s spies had provided him with secret British military-strategy information that stated unequivocally that Spain was not to cede any territory in Morocco or the Canary Islands to any foreign power. Stalin pushed the Spanish left into an action that he most likely knew could do nothing to allay British concerns; instead the action would further alienate Britain.

This offer was made and, of course, was refused since Britain’s Committee of Imperial Defence had insisted that no Spanish territory be offered to any another country. It is interesting that when Morocco offered to fight for the Spanish left if that government would allow Morocco to become an independent state, the idea was, ‘...angrily rejected by Moscow’<sup>11</sup> Stalin supported offering Moroccan territory in exchange for military support when he knew that the offer would be refused and rejected a similar offer when it had a real chance for acceptance. This is not the strategy of someone who was genuinely trying to help the elected Spanish government win a civil war.

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<sup>10</sup> Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*, (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 198

Stalin's motives during the Spanish Civil War were questionable and questioning his motives became more and more unacceptable as the war progressed. When Franz Borkenau returned to Spain for the second time during the Spanish Civil War, freedom of speech was more limited. Borkenau was watched, warned, then arrested. After responding to the most of the charges, Borkenau wrote: "One charge remained; I had described in detail the political pressure the Russians had brought to bear upon Spain in exchange for the help they had been given. If it was a crime to mention this fact, then I was guilty."<sup>12</sup>

Borkenau was more fortunate than he might have realized at the time. Under Soviet direction, a system of prisons were set up in Spain for the "...execution of foreigners and members of the International Brigades whom the Soviets wished to discipline or liquidate, as well as a growing number of native Spaniards..."<sup>13</sup>. Stalin's involvement delayed the conclusion of the Spanish Civil War and ensured swift elimination of those who got in the way.

Stalin directed many of the actions that increased tensions among the groups supporting the elected Spanish left government. Jesús Hernández, who was a Communist minister in the Spanish left's government explained one method the Communists used during the civil war to exacerbate tensions between the groups of the Spanish left:

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<sup>11</sup> Antony Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, (Penguin Books, 2001), 156.

<sup>12</sup> Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish cockpit* (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, The University of Michigan Press, 1971), 250

<sup>13</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 205

...Today we supported this one in his fight against that one, tomorrow we would reverse the roles and support the latter, while today, tomorrow, and always we pushed some against others to their mutual destruction, a game that we practiced...<sup>14</sup>

While Hernandez later took limited regretful responsibility for his actions, he also acknowledged that Stalin was directing this performance.

If the rationalization for Stalin's behavior, the idea that he was trying to forcibly position the Spanish left to successfully negotiate with the British for intervention, is removed from the analysis, what possible alternative reasons could explain Stalin's actions during the Spanish Civil War? This should be more closely analyzed.

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<sup>14</sup>Jesús Hernández, *Yo fui un ministro de Stalin*, 203; quoted by Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 203.

## CHAPTER VIII

### RUSSIAN-GERMAN RELATIONS

After the German-Russian alliance in 1939, Churchill pondered on the date Stalin first decided to align with Hitler. I think it a more apropos exercise to ponder what time before 1939 Germany and Russia not in some way connected. For years, Hitler used anti-communist slogans to his own advantage just as Stalin used anti-Nazi slogans. Fear of a common enemy is a great motivator, but there is evidence that neither Hitler nor Stalin was actually concerned.

Hitler knew that anti-Communism was popular in many countries and he used this fear to his benefit: “In sum: anti-Communism was an important instrument of Hitler’s statesmanship.”<sup>15</sup> However, during this same time, Germany minister of foreign affairs, Kuhlmann communicated to the German ambassador in Moscow that, ‘It is in our best interests that the Bolsheviks should remain in power....If you need more money telegraph the amount.’<sup>16</sup>

For Stalin, the fear of Germany and Nazis was also quite useful. “If Hitler had not existed Stalin would have had to invent him. The threat of Hitler, the threat of intervention, conferred on him [Stalin] enormous powers.”<sup>17</sup> This threat also provided

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<sup>15</sup> John Lucas, *June 1941, Hitler and Stalin*, (New Haven and London: , (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 9, 12

<sup>16</sup> Edvard Radzinsky, *Stalin*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1997) 96

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 312 – 313

a useful diversion. By focusing his opponents' attention on Hitler and the danger he presented, Stalin kept them from looking too closely at Soviet activities.

The tactic of misleading his opponents was a familiar and effective ploy: "Stalin succeeded in continuously misleading his allies during the war years. To a certain extent this made it easier for the scale and strength of his power to escape Western notice. Some politicians simply lost their sense of reality."<sup>18</sup>

While many were convinced that Germany and Russia would not have negotiated with each other prior to 1939, some believe that relations between these two countries continued through the Spanish Civil War.<sup>19</sup> Serious concerns regarding the relationship between these two countries were expressed long before the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939. In 1932, Cecil F. Melville wrote a book warning about, "...Germany's two faces, the one turned toward Western Europe, the other turned towards Soviet Russia."<sup>20</sup> Melville's book, *The Russian Face of Germany* exposed how Stalin helped Germany re-arm in defiance of the Versailles Treaty with Germany in charge of the technical aspects while Russia providing a location outside Germany.<sup>21</sup> Melville's book described a Junkers airplane factory in Russia and a poison gas factory was constructed in Trotsk, but he warned also about the future directions of the German-Russian relationship.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kudryashov, Sergei. (1995) *Stalin and the Allies: Who Deceived Whom*, History Today 45, no. 2 (May 1995): page nr. Retrieved from <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/kudrya.htm>

<sup>19</sup> John Lucas, *June 1941, Hitler and Stalin*, (New Haven and London: , (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 15

<sup>20</sup> Cecil F. Melville, *The Russian Face of Germany*. Paulton & London: Wishart & Co., 1932), 4.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 87.

In spite of the fact that since 1926 Germany has been released from the restrictions in the construction of high-power-engine-aeroplanes...this system of concealing military collaboration with Russia is still being continued by the German Government.<sup>23</sup>

Documentation of German-Russian military ties includes website information published by Mahlon G. Kelly, Professor Emeritus from University of Virginia, on Carl Zeiss of the Carl Zeiss industrial complex. According to Professor Kelly, the Soviet Union contracted with Carl Zeiss in 1936 to "...set up a microscope production plant in Leningrad..."<sup>24</sup> Company Seven, a resource for the international astronomical community and a registered U.S. Department of Defense contractor, provided additional information on the Carl Zeiss industrial complex's ties to the Soviet Union. The historical section of Company Seven's website supports Melville's and Professor Kelly's claims, describing the Carl Zeiss industrial complex as being "generally supportive of the NAZI regime" and then described the firm's activities in Russia:

From shortly before World War I up to World War II the Carl Zeiss firm established subsidiaries in European countries to produce optics. Particularly between the wars some of these companies produced military optics (binoculars for example) which if made in Germany might have aroused international concern. It is not unusual to find the traditional Zeiss trademark with the city of origin in place of "Jena" listed as "Petersburg" Russia, ... It is ironic that some of the equipment manufactured by Zeiss subsidiaries in other European countries might have been employed to equip the Wehrmacht and SS armies...<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>24</sup> Mahlon G Kelly, Why are Russian optics so good? (Mahlon G Kelly, 2001), Retrieved from <http://www.novacon.com.br/lenses08.htm>

<sup>25</sup> Company Seven, *Carl Zeiss - A History Of A Most Respected Name In Optics*. (Company Seven and Carl Zeiss, 1994-2005). Retrieved from <http://www.company7.com/zeiss/history.html>

According to this combined information, Stalin invited Carl Zeiss, a Nazi supporter, if not a zealous Nazi supporter, to the Soviet Union in 1936 where they set up manufacturing support that “ironically” might have been designed for producing Nazi military equipment.

The following two German memos document that Germany and Russia renewed business agreements during the Spanish Civil War requiring Russia to provide Germany with critical raw materials:

[Memo dated January 10, 1938] In order to insure larger raw material imports from the Soviet Union in 1938 at the outset, we have requested that the Russians submit a list to us of those goods which they intend to order in Germany in 1938 and have promised them far-reaching concessions in supplying this list... According to ...Minister President General Goring, we are even prepared to make further concessions in those fields where we have previously refused to make any...<sup>26</sup>

[Memo dated February 21, 1938] The Economic Treaty for 1937 could not be renewed for 1938 on time... The deliveries and orders from Russia, therefore, have been at a standstill since the end of 1937, to the detriment of the German economy... it is important for us in these negotiations to maintain and, if possible, to increase the raw material purchases from Russia.<sup>27</sup>

Cooperation between Stalin and Hitler during the Spanish Civil War is also supported by a Yale University webpage, *German-Soviet Cooperation & Soviet Tanks*

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<sup>26</sup> Memo No 613. Memorandum on the Status of German-Russian Negotiations – January 10 1938. (Yale Law School Avalon Project, 1938) Retrieved from [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/nsa613.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/nsa613.asp)

<sup>27</sup> Memo No 619. Memorandum on the German-Russian Negotiations – February 21 1938. (Yale Law School Avalon Project, 1938) Retrieved from [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/nsa619.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/nsa619.asp)

in the Spanish Civil War<sup>28</sup>, which lists research documents on, “...all aspects of the Red Army's collaboration with the Reichswehr. The materials range from 1918 to 1938...” It is interesting to note that this range of dates extends into the first three years of the Spanish Civil War.

A Spanish minister during the civil war, Zugazagoitia, wrote after the war about fearfully noticing German-Soviet cooperation during that war. Zugazagoitia described indications of possible Gestapo involvement in the retaliation against the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM), a Marxist group Stalin wished to liquidate during the Spanish Civil War<sup>29, 30</sup>.

Stalin's involvement extended, rather than shortened the duration of the Spanish Civil War. That situation met Hitler's needs at that time. Hitler preferred the civil war to extend out rather than end quickly<sup>31</sup>, “an extended war suited his [Hitler's] purposes better”<sup>32</sup> When German military commanders brought complaints to Hitler about how slow the war was going, “...he brushed them aside, for Franco's seemingly dilatory tactics suited the Fuhrer very well.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The Yale Russian Archive Project *German-Soviet Cooperation & Soviet Tanks in the Spanish Civil War*. Yale University, n.d.), Retrieved from <http://www.yale.edu/rusarch/tanks.html>

<sup>29</sup> Victor Alba, and Steven Schwartz, *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism*, (New Brunswick & Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988), 245.

<sup>30</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 296, 194.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>32</sup> Antony Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, (Penguin Books, 2001), 197.

<sup>33</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Franco and Hitler*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 28.



Stalin's tactics in the Spanish Civil War served Hitler well. For example, Soviet arms were not sent immediately after war broke out, when some believed a quick response could end the war quickly. As explained earlier, when the soviet arms finally arrived in Spain, there were not enough to win the war, only delay its conclusion<sup>34, 35</sup>.

Some Spaniards suspected plotting between Russian and Germany against Spain before 1939. In Claudio Sanchez Albornoz's memoirs, he recalled that, "...I have heard Asua describe how...he learned...about the negotiations between the governments of Stalin and Hitler, which were preparing the betrayal of the Spanish Republic. And he could not make the Negrin government believe him."<sup>36</sup> Burnett Bolloton also believed in this possibility: "...it is most likely that Stalin, quite early in the Spanish Civil War, had in mind the idea of striking a bargain with Hitler..."<sup>37</sup>

Indalecio Prieto describes a situation during the Spanish Civil War where the Communists blocked a retaliatory mission:

The day the German squadron bombed the Almeria Port [1937-05-31] I quickly met ...to propose to them an aerial attack... that could have been very large... They suspended the Consejo without reaching an agreement to meet again with the president ...When the Consejo resumed it was Mr. Uribe [Communist minister], ... who came before everyone to oppose my suggestion ... He and his partner Mr. Jesús Hernández [Communist minister] ...had already received the order from the Russian Ambassador. Today, after the

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<sup>34</sup> Victor Alba, and Steven Schwartz, *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism*, (New Brunswick & Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988), 159.

<sup>35</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 172.

<sup>36</sup> Victor Alba, and Steven Schwartz, *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism*, (New Brunswick & Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988), 240.

<sup>37</sup> Burnett Bolloten, *The Grand camouflage*. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961), 139, n 32.

Hitler-Stalin pact, the attitude of the communist ministers is understood, that which I found unexplainable on that dramatic morning.<sup>38</sup>

In March 1938, when Spanish president Azana wanted to find a way to negotiate an end to the civil war, Horiato Prieto accused the Spanish government of playing a Russian game that was destroying Spain<sup>39</sup>. Under Communist pressure, the war continued.

In Franco's book, *Palabras del Caudillo*, the press asked Franco why the Spanish left had not surrendered when they were experiencing such desperation. Franco replied that, "The only explanation is the absence of patriotism and the criminal spirit of the red leaders."<sup>40</sup>

Another plausible explanation is that Hitler wanted Spain's civil war to continue on while he removed raw materials from Spain. Was Stalin able to pretend to help one side of a conflict while actually assisting the opposite side? According to Stanley Payne, "The Communists played a double role ...but that had been their standard procedure since 1917" Payne states that, "...the evidence is clear that...Stalin hoped to play both ends against the middle."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Indalecio Prieto, *Cómo y por qué salí del ministerio de defense nacional*, Trans. Matias Garcia Avila and Kristine Pelletier Garcia (Barcelona: Fundacion Indalecio Prieto, 1974), 12.

<sup>39</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 251.

<sup>40</sup> Franco, *Palabras del Caudillo*, 19 April 1937 – 31 Diciembre 1938, Editora Nacional, 1939), 294; Indalecio Prieto, *Cómo y por qué salí del ministerio de defense nacional*, Trans. Matias Garcia Avila and Kristine Pelletier Garcia (Barcelona: Fundacion Indalecio Prieto, 1974), 12.

<sup>41</sup> Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*, (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 138., 145

In May 1938, the Soviet policy of prolonging the civil war continued against the wishes of many in the Spanish government who were in favor of ending the war<sup>42</sup>,

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Shifts in both Stalin's and Hitler's interest in the Spanish Civil War began in 1938. In July 1938, a verbal agreement was reached between Germany and the Soviet Union to end press attacks on each other's chiefs of state and a Soviet foreign minister began to openly discuss the benefits of withdrawing from Spain. A verbal agreement between Soviet foreign minister Litvinov and German Ambassador von der Schulenburg was made in mid 1938 to the effect that, "the press in the two powers would cease personal attacks on each other's chiefs of state..." and then further explained that, "The Soviet foreign minister now 'considered it best to withdraw from the Spanish venture...'"<sup>44</sup>

Hitler and Stalin stopped using fear of each other to manipulate others -- they seemed to stop noticing each other.<sup>45</sup> Stalin directed the actions of his ministers, therefore it appears that in mid 1938, Stalin had begun to implement a German – Soviet alliance.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>43</sup> Alexander Dallin, and F.I. Firsov, *Dimitrov & Stalin 1934 – 1943, Letters from the Soviet Archives*, (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2000), 74.

<sup>44</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 267.

<sup>45</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 267.

Stalin was sent a memo in August 1938 detailing food shortages and Spanish people close to starvation<sup>46</sup>. In August 1938, a Soviet decision was made to withdraw remaining volunteers from Spain and the Spanish government would no longer be allowed to purchase supplies from Russia on credit<sup>47</sup>. The Munich agreement in September 1938 coincided with a call from the ComIntern, which was controlled by Stalin, for withdrawal of foreign troops<sup>48</sup>. While many believe that the Munich agreement angered Stalin and caused him to shift alliances, that view is not shared by Edvard Radzinsky, who believed that the Munich agreement gave Stalin the justification for what he was already preparing to do – openly shift political alliances<sup>49</sup>.

Hitler's interest in the continuation of the Spanish Civil War also declined in 1938. Franco had been forced to give Hitler 60-75% equity in 4 of the 5 main Montana Companies in exchange for military support for Franco's final war campaign<sup>50</sup>. In late October 1938, Hitler told the French Ambassador in Berlin that Spain had provided some, "economic advantages" but that Hitler had no permanent plans there and recommended that it was at that time in France's best interests to pull French

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<sup>46</sup> Alexander Dallin, and F.I. Firsov, *Dimitrov & Stalin 1934 – 1943, Letters from the Soviet Archives*, (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2000), 77.

<sup>47</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 268 –269.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>49</sup> Edvard Radzinsky, *Stalin*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1997), 441.

<sup>50</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Franco and Hitler*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 30.

volunteers out of Spain and let Franco win<sup>51</sup>. In December of 1938, Hitler began to express his desire to see the civil war concluded “as soon as possible.”<sup>52</sup>.

While Stalin encouraged the Spaniards to fight to the last Spaniard, communist leaders prepared to finally leave Spain to the Spaniards<sup>53</sup>. Interestingly, even as Stalin prepared to leave, he stepped up his efforts to liquidate members of the POUM and Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI).

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<sup>51</sup> The French Yellow Book (Yale Law School Avalon Project, n.d.) Retrieved from <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/ylbk018.asp>

<sup>52</sup> Edvard Radzinsky, *Stalin*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1997), 277, 440.

<sup>53</sup> Antony Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, (Penguin Books, 2001), 253.

## CHAPTER IX

### SUMMARY

If those in Spain with wealth and power had reduced the disparity between the rich and poor before the later were so desperate just for the basics needed for continued existence, the left would not have been placed in a situation where they had nothing to lose by courting Stalin. The scenario that played out during the Spanish Civil War could have happened in another country and could happen again.

After meeting with Stalin at the end of WWII, General Marshall concluded that Stalin planned to focus his political efforts on countries torn apart by war. General Marshall immediately started working to provide aid to help Europe rebuild, a United States initiative that became known as the Marshall Plan – because General Marshall accurately concluded that desperation is a situation best avoided.<sup>54</sup> Other contributing causes of the war were also of Spanish origin such as a lack of good roads for transportation that encouraged regional, rather than national allegiances. More should be done to encourage Spanish scholars to join in the international debate and discussion.

Britain could never have been convinced to come to the aid of the Spanish left during their civil war. They would have been more likely to support Franco against the Spanish left. Stalin expressed concern that if Britain did intervene in the Spanish Civil War,

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<sup>54</sup> D.M. Giangreco and Robert E. Griffin, *Airbridge to Berlin --- the Berlin crisis of 1948, its origins and aftermath* (Chapter section posted on the Truman Library online, 1988). Retrieved from [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/BERLIN\\_A/BOC.HTM](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/BERLIN_A/BOC.HTM)

they might intervene in support of Franco against the Spanish left<sup>55</sup>. This scenario fits with Britain's frustration with the Spanish left's inability to provide a stable international business environment.

The government of the Spanish left, made up of groups that did not like each other, encouraged poor and starving people that serious inequities would be addressed, then abandoned them at a moment of crisis, alienating their own constituency. This same government had policies, supposedly for the very people they abandoned, that alienated groups, companies, and countries who could have provided assistance in time of need and yet the government remained too politically naïve to realize what they had done. They did, however, have tons of gold and no one to sell them arms in exchange for that gold.

Stalin has been described as enjoying responding to situations like he was playing a game of chess, playing both sides and/or playing groups against each other and “moving in opposite directions simultaneously”<sup>56</sup>. From this perspective, the Spanish Civil War game would be game too enticing to pass up: a country desperate for help, much to gain by getting involved, and little to lose.

Stalin manipulated the Spanish left into sending him their gold because it was so easy to do. Having read the reports of the Committee of Imperial Defence, Stalin knew that the British were not going to intervene in Spain and that the Spanish left would most likely lose the war eventually. He could have justified taking the Spanish

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<sup>55</sup> Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*, (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 134-5.

government's gold on the grounds that the left would most likely have lost it at the end of the war anyway. None of the gold shipped to the Soviet Union was ever returned. The Soviet Union claimed that they deserved to keep it to offset their financial losses in Spain, but the Soviet Union suffered no financial loss over the Spanish Civil War. Payne proposed that:

...the wartime Republic paid its own way, and both the Soviet Union and the French Communist Party probably turned a profit on their activities on its behalf...Soviet suppliers saw the desperate condition of the Republican forces as an opportunity to eliminate obsolete Soviet stocks of World War I and even older equipment...prices were inflated...30 to 40 percent above the international market rate...The Republican government was billed for all salaries and expenses of Soviet personnel, their dependents, and their vacations...<sup>57</sup>

Stalin respected strength and resolve. He admired Ivan the Terrible<sup>58</sup> and expressed admiration for Hitler after the “night-of-the-long-knives.” Stalin’s official policy was to assist the elected government of Spain, but he would not have respected such a weak government nor would he have believed they deserved respect.

Someone Stalin did respect and fear was Hitler. Stalin and Hitler were not enemies in 1936 – they were partners during the Spanish Civil War. Hitler needed raw materials found in Spain to help Germany prepare for war. The Spanish left’s government would not have allowed Hitler to take them, so Hitler traded Franco military support for raw materials.

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<sup>56</sup> Edvard Radzinsky, *Stalin*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1997), 337.

<sup>57</sup> Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*, (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). 152 – 157.

<sup>58</sup> Edvard Radzinsky, *Stalin*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1997), 317.



Hitler needed the civil war to last long enough to extract the raw materials, ship them out of Spain. Stalin provided Hitler with that time. Hitler also ensured that the majority of Spain's raw materials went to Germany rather than Britain, even though Britain owned some of the companies involved. Hitler's final move was to trade the final support Franco needed for control of raw material producing companies. When he had enough raw materials extracted and had this agreement in place; Hitler was ready for the Spanish Civil War to end.

As a good partner, Stalin ensured the civil war continued long enough for Hitler to extract from Spain the materials he needed. Stalin offered support to people who were desperate with few options. Then Stalin distracted many people in Spain, as well as many in other nations, from looking too closely at German economic maneuvers or Soviet political activities in Spain by creating a diversion combined of playing the "look at what Germany is doing militarily in Spain" card, touting Stalin's unique genius in being able to persuade Britain to intervene in the war, and by dangling the idea that British intervention was just around the corner, if only the Spanish left allowed Stalin to control their government and their war. Did General Marshall glimpse Stalin's long-term strategy and react successfully to counter Stalin's final checkmate move? I believe he did.

Why did Stalin hate his Spanish political opponents so much that he would build prisons in Spain to deal with them? Why would Stalin continue to persecute these Spanish political opponents while planning to leave Spain? Robert C. Tucker, who wrote the Forward to the book, *Stalin's Letter's to Molotov*, explained that the people who set off Stalin's "death-dealing anger and vindictiveness" were those who interfered with Stalin's search for glory or contradicted Stalin's need to be perceived as a genius. His Spanish opponents committed both crimes<sup>59</sup>.

Stalin's role in the Spanish Civil War should be re-analyzed by first removing all justifications of manipulating Spanish politics with the goal of changing British perspectives on the Spanish-left's elected government to convince the British to intervene on behalf of the Spanish left. There was no chance that the British would adopt any policy but that of non-intervention in Spain's civil war. The Spanish left's Republican government complained that this policy was unfair and the League of Nations promised to reconsider the policy of non-intervention if it proved ineffective, but the policy held until early 1939 when the British and French governments formally recognized Franco's national government.

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<sup>59</sup> Robert C. Tucker, *Forward to Stalin's Letters to Molotov*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995),

Unofficial recognition of Franco's government came much sooner. Churchill was questioned on November 4, 1937 about whether the British government had recognized Franco's government. Churchill replied that in order to protect British nationals and commercial interests, "His Majesty's Government have entered upon negotiation of the appointment of agents by them and by General Franco respectively...." The appointed agent told Franco that they had "...achieved something leading to the reestablishment of the normal relations",<sup>60</sup>

Regarding the question of whether Stalin would have ignored British reports detailing why Britain could not and would not intervene in Spain, consider the perspective provided by US Military historians. According to these military experts, the 1930's were the Soviet Union's golden age of military thought that involved careful study of the realities they faced. Stalin used his expert military leaders during the Spanish Civil War and then had them killed. According to these experts, Stalin would not have ignored the realities provided in secret reports provided to him by Soviet spies located in Britain's foreign office.

Another distraction to remove is Stalin and Hitler's constant fussing about how much they hated each other. Instead of focusing on what they disagreed on, look for what they had in common. Look for what Hitler could gain by being involved in Spain and what Stalin could gain, then use not just data that both controlled and

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<sup>60</sup> Herbert W. Briggs, *Relations Officieuses and Intent to Recognize: British Recognition of Franco*. (New York: The American Journal of International Law, Vol. 34, 1940) pp. 47-57, retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2192964>

manipulated, but data from other sources combined with a personality analysis of both to derive what each would most likely do in a given situation.

Something else that should be analyzed is how closely the dates of the beginning and end of the Stalin purges match those of the beginning and end of the Spanish Civil War. While many people killed in these purges were not involved in the Spanish Civil War, it would not be unlike Stalin to use the purges to eliminate potential opponents while covering his tracks in Spain – the dead leak no secrets. Analysis of the Spanish Civil War is not treated as critical to understanding WWII, but if Stalin and Hitler were, as I believe, secretly colluding in Spain to prepare for WWII, then any secrets they hid during the Spanish Civil War could be significant. Closer analysis of the Spanish Civil War might be the key to answering many nagging questions regarding Hitler and Stalin during WWII.

Another area that deserves scholarly research is a comparison of Stalin's role and methods in Spain and his role and methods in China. A comparison of complaints waged by Stalin's Spanish allies with complaints wages by Chinese communists might be useful. Is there a pattern? During my research, I ran across some of this information and there did seem to be similarities, but since this was not my primary area for research, I did not spend much time looking at the information. I believe, however, that it deserves attention.

If there are similarities between Stalin's role and methods in Spain and China, analyzing this pattern might help decipher Stalin's long-term strategic plans and how that plan was affected by the Marshall plan.

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## **APPENDIX A.**

### **IMPERIAL DEFENCE REPORT, AUGUST 1936**

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SECRET.

Copy No. 41

C.P. 234 (36).

CABINET.

WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN: SITUATION ARISING FROM THE  
SPANISH CIVIL WAR.

NOTE BY THE ACTING SECRETARY.

THE accompanying Report by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, which has not yet been considered by the Committee of Imperial Defence, is circulated to the Cabinet at the request of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

(Signed) R. B. HOWORTH,  
*Acting Secretary to the Cabinet.*

2 Whitehall Gardens, S.W. 1,  
August 31, 1936.

[13728]

*Printed for the Committee of Imperial Defence. August 1936.*

SECRET.

1259-B.

(Also Paper No. C.O.S. 509.)

# COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE.

## WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN: SITUATION ARISING FROM THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR.

### Report by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee.

IN accordance with the request contained in the letter from the Foreign Office which is attached as Annex I to this Report, we have had under consideration the extent to which British interests would be affected and what action His Majesty's Government might take in the event of Italy taking some action which might upset the existing balance in the Western Mediterranean.

#### *British interests in the Western Mediterranean.*

2. The chief British interest in the Western Mediterranean is the safety of our trade and of our sea and air communications which pass through the Straits of Gibraltar and close along the southern shore of Spain. For the purpose of maintaining the required degree of security in this area, as well as for the protection of our sea communications with South America and the Cape, it is essential that Gibraltar should continue to be available to us as a secure naval base. In addition, it is hoped to establish in the comparatively near future an air base at Gibraltar which will be a key station in the "all red" air routes from United Kingdom both to the Far East and to the Cape. Even if the air route through the Mediterranean were to be closed to us through the loss or destruction of air facilities at Malta, the Gibraltar air base would still be essential for the use of the alternative air route via the west coast of Africa.

3. For 150 miles east of Gibraltar both shores of the Mediterranean are Spanish, and are no more than one hundred miles apart at any point. In a war with a European Power it would, therefore, be essential to our interests that Spain should be friendly, or at worst, strictly neutral. A hostile Spain or the occupation of Spanish territory by a hostile Power would make our control of the Straits and use of Gibraltar as a naval and air base extremely difficult, if not impossible, and would thus imperil Imperial communications by way of the Mediterranean.

Similarly, apart from the situation in the Western Mediterranean itself, the possession by a hostile Power of harbours on the Atlantic seaboard in Spanish territory would imperil our communications by way of the Atlantic.

4. Our position at Gibraltar has for many years been based on a continuation of friendly relations with Spain. Apart from the risk of any foreign intervention, should a Government inimical to Britain, whether Fascist or Communist, emerge from the present struggle, the question of the security of our base at Gibraltar will require serious examination.

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5. Our interests in the present Spanish crisis may therefore be summarised as—

- (a) the maintenance of the Territorial integrity of Spain and her possessions (Balearics, Morocco, Canaries and Rio de Oro);
- (b) the maintenance of such relations with any Spanish Government that may emerge from this conflict as will ensure benevolent neutrality in the event of our being engaged in any European war.

*Italy and the Morocco Treaty position.*

6. The Treaty position as regards fortifications and cession of territory in Morocco, so far as we have been able to assess it is explained in Annex II. The effect of existing conventions seems to be briefly as follows :

- (1) France, Spain and ourselves are all bound to prevent the erection of fortifications, &c., on the Spanish-Moroccan coast bordering on the Mediterranean with the exception of certain ports and islands which are under full Spanish sovereignty.
- (2) With the same exceptions, Spain is under an obligation not to cede any of her rights in her sphere of influence in Morocco to another Power.

POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION BY ITALY.

7. It is clear that Italy is the Power that has most to gain by upsetting the existing balance in the Western Mediterranean since her present strategic position in the Mediterranean is obviously unfavourable. Both exits are in foreign hands, and her seaborne trade with countries outside the Mediterranean is therefore at the mercy of any Power that can control the Straits of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal. Consequently, it is not impossible that Italy may try to take advantage of the present crisis in Spain to improve her position in the Mediterranean.

8. The steps which Italy might take with the above object in view may be summarised as follows :—

- (i) She might openly intervene in support of the insurgents;
- (ii) She might create some pretext, such as the protection of her nationals or the infringement of her maritime rights, to occupy Spanish territory in a less conspicuous way;
- (iii) Signor Mussolini might obtain from General Franco the promise of the lease, or cession, of some Spanish territory in exchange for his effective intervention in the present struggle. Territories which might be so bartered are—

part of Spain itself, one or more of the Balearic Islands, part of Spanish Morocco, the Canary Islands, and Rio de Oro;

- (iv) In addition, or alternatively to (iii) above, Signor Mussolini might come to an understanding with General Franco that, in exchange for effective Italian intervention, the latter would conclude an offensive-defensive Italo-Spanish alliance when he came into power.

The above measures, and particularly the effect which they would have on British interests, are discussed *seriatim* in the paragraphs that follow.

9. *With regard to Paragraph 8 (i) above, open Italian intervention in support of the insurgents* would precipitate a major international crisis. It would be beyond the scope of this Paper to attempt to consider in detail the situation that would arise.

10. The possibilities summarised in paragraph 8 (ii) and (iii) will be considered together, since the material effect of an Italian occupation of any of the territories in question, however that occupation is brought about, is much the same.

11. *The Occupation by Italy of any land in the Spanish Peninsula* would obviously prejudice the security of our position at Gibraltar and of our communications. But the Spaniards are a people intensely proud of their own race and country, and we, therefore, consider it reasonable to rule out the

possibility of any permanent Italian occupation of Spain itself. It is true that Catalonia might split away, but we do not think even this province could be dominated by foreigners for long.

12. *The Italian occupation of any part of Spanish Morocco*, and particularly of Ceuta, which is fifteen miles from Gibraltar, would bring Gibraltar within range of heavy Italian air attack, and thus deny to us its full use as a Naval Base. In addition, the possession and possible development by Italy of any of the Spanish Moroccan ports, small and undeveloped though they are at the present time, would contribute to our difficulties in controlling the Straits of Gibraltar. Accordingly, we regard the maintenance of the territorial integrity of Spanish Morocco as of vital importance to British interests. France also has an interest in this possibility, since an Italian occupation of the territory in question would menace the communications between her Mediterranean and Atlantic seaboard.

13. *An Italian occupation of any of the Balearic Islands* would probably not be acceptable to the islanders themselves, but the possibilities of their having to submit to *force majeure* cannot be ruled out.

The naval facilities in these islands are at present as follows :—

Majorca, 450 miles from Gibraltar, has no harbour entirely suitable for a naval base, since Palma and Pollenza Bay, although good in some ways, are too exposed. Minorca, which is still further from Gibraltar, has in Port Mahon a small, but heavily defended, naval base.

As regards air facilities, there are, so far as is known, no military air stations in the Balearic Islands at the present time; but there is no doubt that they could be established without great difficulty. It is understood that there is a satisfactory aerodrome site at Pollenza, and that civil seaplane services were operated at Port Mahon and Palma in 1932.

In view of the foregoing an Italian occupation of any of the Balearic Islands would not vitally affect British strategical interests. At the same time it would give Italy a base for naval and air operations, 250 miles nearer Gibraltar than anything which she possesses at the present time. The menace to our control of the Straits and to Gibraltar itself would thus be increased.

14. It is to be noted in addition that an Italian occupation of any of the Balearic Islands would constitute a direct threat to French communications between France and her possessions in Northern Africa; it is, therefore, reasonable to assume that an enterprise of this kind would be most energetically opposed by France.

15. *An Italian occupation of the Canary Islands and/or Rio de Oro* would present her with a base flanking our communications to the Cape of Good Hope and South America. Since, in a war with Italy, the bulk of our eastern trade might have to use the Cape route, it is clear that an Italian occupation of either the Canary Islands or Rio de Oro would be prejudicial to our interests.

#### *An Italo-Spanish Alliance.*

16. It remains to consider the possibility indicated in paragraph 8 (iv), namely, the conclusion of an Italo-Spanish alliance. The effect of this would be that Spanish ports and aerodromes would be available for the use of Italian forces in time of war. This would constitute a most serious menace not only to our use of Gibraltar as a naval and air base, and to our control of the Straits, but also to our Imperial communications.

From the French point of view an Italo-Spanish alliance is equally undesirable, though obviously for different reasons.

17. It will be seen from the foregoing that the adoption by Italy of any of the courses of action which have been discussed in the preceding paragraphs would in effect be a threat, to a greater or lesser degree, to British and French interests.

We now turn to the question of what action His Majesty's Government might take to safeguard the situation.

#### ACTION OPEN TO HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT.

18. The successful issue of the Abyssinian campaign in the face of League opposition, suggests that Mussolini, if determined to exploit the Spanish crisis to his own advantage, will not be deterred by threats, and only by the certainty

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that force, and adequate force, will be employed against him. We are, therefore, driven to the conclusion that any action, other than action in the diplomatic sphere, which His Majesty's Government might take which would effectively thwart his designs, must inevitably involve a serious risk of war between Great Britain and Italy.

19. The relative preparedness for war of these two countries has been examined so exhaustively during the past twelve months that it is unnecessary in this paper to reconsider the question in any detail. Suffice it to say that Italy is the only Power whose forces are fully mobilised and available for immediate operations.

20. We now turn to the consideration of what action, other than the threat of direct military action, might be taken by His Majesty's Government to prevent Italy from embarking upon any of the enterprises visualised at the beginning of this Report. Before setting out our views on this point we venture to suggest, with the memories of last year's events still fresh in our minds, that we should avoid at all costs the possibility of becoming involved in action which, on the one hand, fails to achieve our object, and, on the other hand, tends further to alienate Italy, *i.e.*, we should take no action which we are not prepared to back up by all the force at our command. This statement is made on the understanding that Italy is the only enemy in contemplation.

21. With that general proviso, the courses of action that appear advisable are summarised as follows:—

In the first place, we should press for the conclusion and rigid enforcement of a universal agreement of non-interference in Spain by all European Powers. If such an agreement can be reached and enforced, there would be no reason for the winning side in Spain to grant territorial concessions to, or negotiate closer military relations with, her neighbours than now exist.

22. If no general agreement of non-intervention can be reached, we should not cease to impress on France, whose strategic interests are largely identical with our own, the desirability of giving no cause for intervention by Italy. Support by France and Russia to the forces of the Spanish Left may well lead Italy to afford open support to General Franco.

23. We should endeavour to ensure that any action taken by Foreign Powers, either to protect their nationals in Spanish territory or exact reparations, is international and concerted.

Failing such agreement, every endeavour should be made locally for concerted action to be taken when occasion arises.

This applies with particular force to action by Italian ships; and we should, therefore, arrange that wherever an Italian man-of-war is berthed in Spanish waters there is also a British ship, and that at important ports the British Senior Naval Officer is, if possible, senior to the Italian.

24. Since this report was put in hand, we have seen a copy of the Foreign Office memorandum that has recently been circulated to the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy (Paper No. F.P. (36) 10). It is suggested in this Paper that it should be made publicly plain that "any alteration of the *status quo* in the Western Mediterranean must be a matter of the closest concern to His Majesty's Government." We agree that Signor Mussolini should be under no misapprehension as to the possible consequences of any action that he may take to disturb the existing balance in the Western Mediterranean; and we, therefore, desire to endorse the Foreign Office suggestion.

#### SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS.

- 25.—(i) Our interests in the present Spanish crisis are the maintenance—  
 (a) of the territorial integrity of Spain and her possessions, and  
 (b) of such relations with any Spanish Government which may emerge from this conflict as will ensure benevolent neutrality in the event of our being engaged in a European war;  
 (ii) Open intervention by Italy in support of the insurgents in Spain would precipitate a major international crisis;



## 5.

- (iii) The occupation by Italy of any territory in Spain itself would be detrimental to British interests;
- (iv) The Italian occupation of any part of Spanish Morocco, and particularly of Ceuta, would be a threat to vital British interests;
- (v) The Italian occupation of any of the Balearic Islands, Canary Islands, and/or Rio de Oro, is highly undesirable from the point of view of British interests, but cannot be regarded as a vital menace;
- (vi) Any of the contingencies specified in (ii) to (v) above would be injurious in greater or lesser degree to French interests;
- (vii) The conclusion of any Italo-Spanish alliance would constitute a threat to vital British interests;
- (viii) The threat of effective action, other than action in a diplomatic sphere, to thwart Italian designs would involve a grave risk of war;
- (ix) Italy is the only Power whose forces are mobilised and ready for immediate action. Her preparedness for the initial phase of hostilities, *vis-à-vis* Great Britain, is greater than it was nine months ago.

## RECOMMENDATIONS.

26. Our recommendations may be summarised as follows:—

- (i) The principle that should govern any action on the part of His Majesty's Government should be that it is most important to avoid any measures which, while failing to achieve our object, merely tend further to alienate Italy;
- (ii) We should press for the earliest possible conclusion of a non-interference pact in Spain, embracing France, Russia, Portugal, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom;
- (iii) If no general agreement can be reached, we should impress on the French the desirability of giving no cause for intervention by Italy;
- (iv) We should maintain sufficient naval forces on the Western Mediterranean and Spanish Atlantic coasts to ensure that we have at least one ship at every port where the Italians have one, and that at important ports the British S.N.O. is, if possible, senior to the Italian;
- (v) We should, if possible, get an agreement with the other Powers that any landing or other action by armed forces to preserve order should be not only international in character, but also, wherever this is possible, preconcerted between the Powers affected;
- (vi) Failing such agreement, every endeavour should be made locally for concerted action to be taken when occasion arises;
- (vii) We should make it known to Signor Mussolini that, in the words of F.P. (36) 10, "any alteration of the *status quo* in the Western Mediterranean must be a matter of the closest concern to His Majesty's Government" in order that he may be under no misapprehension as to the consequences of any action that he may take to disturb the existing balance.

(Signed)

E. L. ELLINGTON.

C. J. DEVERELL.

C. E. KENNEDY-PURVIS.

(A.C.N.S. for C.N.S.)

2 Whitehall Gardens, S.W. 1,

August 24, 1936.

## ANNEX I.

W. 8332/G.

Dear Colonel Ismay,

*Foreign Office,**August 12, 1936.*

LORD HALIFAX has asked me to write to you to ask that the Chiefs of Staff should begin considering to what extent British interests would be affected, and what action they advise that His Majesty's Government should take in what is, of course, still regarded as the unlikely event of Italy taking some action which might upset the existing balance in the Western Mediterranean.

We do not wish to give the impression that the Foreign Office have any real fears on this point at the present time, but it seems important that we should be prepared to consider what should be the reaction and the reply of His Majesty's Government to any such step as the landing of Italian troops in Spanish territory, or the creation by Italy of some pretext to occupy territory in a less conspicuous way, or the grant by General Franco of the lease of some island to Italy. We should be grateful if you would kindly take the appropriate steps to have these possibilities examined.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) ALEXANDER CADOGAN.

Colonel H. L. Ismay, C.B., D.S.O.,  
Committee of Imperial Defence.

## ANNEX II.

## ITALY AND MOROCCO TREATY POSITION.

So far as can be gathered from a cursory examination of the treaties, the position as regards fortifications in Morocco is as follows:—

By Article 7 of the Declaration of the 8th April, 1904, between the United Kingdom and France, both Governments are bound not to permit the erection of any fortifications or strategic works on that portion of the coast of Morocco comprised between, but not including Melilla and the heights which command the right bank of the River Sebor. This condition does not apply to the places which were in the occupation of Spain on the Moorish Coast of the Mediterranean, *i.e.*, Ceuta, Melilla and probably also the following islands:—

Penon de Velez;  
Alhucemas; and  
Zafrin.

Under Article 3 of the secret portion of the Declaration of the 8th April, 1904, the two Governments also agreed that on Spain acquiring a sphere of influence in Morocco she would have to undertake not to alienate any part of that sphere.

Both of these stipulations were reproduced in the Franco-Spanish Convention respecting Morocco, signed on the 3rd October, 1904, under Article 1 of which Spain adhered to the Anglo-French Declaration of the preceding April. Under Article 7 of this Convention, Spain undertook not to alienate or to cede in any form, even temporarily, the whole or any part of her sphere of influence in Morocco.

The relations between Spain and France in Morocco were again regulated in 1912 by the Convention dated the 27th November of that year (it does not appear, however, that the Convention of the 3rd October, 1904, was abrogated). Under Article 5 of this new Convention, Spain again engaged herself not to alienate, even temporarily, her rights in any part of the territory composing her zone of influence; and under Article 6 both Governments undertook not to permit fortifications or strategic works on the coast of Morocco above mentioned.

So far as can be traced, Italy is under no obligation not to fortify any part of the coast of Morocco except at Tangier, the statute of which she acceded to in 1928.

The position in brief, therefore, seems to be as follows :—

- (1) France, Spain, and ourselves are all bound to prevent the erection of fortifications, &c., on the Spanish-Moroccan coast bordering on the Mediterranean, with the exception of certain ports and islands above mentioned which are under full Spanish sovereignty.
  - (2) With the same exceptions, Spain is under an obligation not to cede any of her rights in her sphere of influence in Morocco to another Power.
-

## **APPENDIX B.**

### **IMPERIAL DEFENCE REPORT, OCTOBER 1936**

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S E C R E T

COPY NO. 44

C.I.D. 294 (36)

C A B I N E T

GIBRALTAR AS A LINK IN IMPERIAL AIR COMMUNICATIONS

THE PROBLEM OF ESTABLISHING AN AIR BASE

In accordance with the Conclusion recorded by the Committee of Imperial Defence at their 283rd Meeting held on the 29th October, 1936, the following Papers are circulated for the consideration of the Cabinet:-

- (i) Extract from the draft Minutes<sup>\*</sup> of the 283rd Meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence.
- (ii) Memorandum by the Joint Oversea and Home Defence Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence (C.I.D. Paper No.424-C).
- (iii) Extract from Minutes of the 281st Meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence, held on 30th July, 1936.
- (iv) Copy of letter from the Law Officers of the Crown to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (C.I.D. Paper No.429-C).
- (v) Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Air (C.I.D. Paper No.428-C).

(Signed) M.P.A. HANKEY

Secretary to the Cabinet.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.1.

30th October, 1936.

\* These Minutes, being in draft form only, are subject to correction.

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*Printed for the Committee of Imperial Defence. October 1936.*

SECRET.

Copy No. 2

# COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE.

*Extract from the DRAFT Minutes of the 283rd Meeting, held on  
October 29, 1936.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## (6)—GIBRALTAR AS A LINK IN IMPERIAL COMMUNICATIONS: THE PROBLEM OF ESTABLISHING AN AIR BASE.

(C.I.D. Paper No. 428-C.)

(Previous reference: C.I.D. Minutes of the 281st Meeting, Minute 1.)

THE COMMITTEE had under consideration a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Air (C.I.D. Paper No. 428-C) requesting the authority of the Committee to proceed with the work of establishing an air base on a site to be reclaimed from the sea to the west of the British Neutral Ground.

LORD SWINTON explained that he desired the Committee to recommend the taking of initial steps towards implementing the proposals for the air base. He pointed out that the Law Officers of the Crown, in a letter to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, dated the 20th October, 1936,\* stated that in their opinion we had a *prima facie* case entitling us to take these steps, although they could not guarantee a favourable decision should the matter be brought before The Hague Court. He observed that in their view the more the provision of the aerodrome could be related to the needs of Gibraltar as a fortress, the better our case would be. This was a very favourable point, since the General Staff of any country would have to admit that a great fortress should possess air facilities, which were in these days a vital necessity for it. It was true that, from our point of view, the aerodrome would be of greater importance in its capacity as a staging point for reinforcing aircraft, but it would be necessary in stating our case, should it come to that, that we should make as much as possible of the importance of the aerodrome to the fortress itself.

SIR SAMUEL HOARE said that he had looked into this question in considerable detail during his recent visit to Gibraltar. The site which it was proposed to reclaim to the west of the British Neutral Ground was really the only possibility. The reclamation of such a big area was certainly a large undertaking, but we have in the past carried out similar reclamation work, though on a smaller scale, at Gibraltar, and there should be no particular engineering difficulties. The site proposed would interfere to some extent with the commercial use of the Harbour, but not very seriously. One difficulty was that the proposed site would bring the aerodrome right up against Spanish Barracks in their territory. It would be essential, therefore, for the free use of the aerodrome, to have a friendly Spain. The Spanish Government have never seriously protested at previous reclamation schemes, although admittedly none had been carried out adjacent to our Neutral Ground. The aerodrome was essential to us not only from the defence point of view, but also in connection with civil air routes. He felt that we must be prepared to face the possible international complications which might arise, and he therefore supported Lord Swinton in pressing for early action.

\* Subsequently circulated as C.I.D. Paper No. 429-C.



SIR ROBERT VANSITTART considered that the matter should, in any case, be referred to the Cabinet, owing to the political issues involved. It was highly probable that a Government led by General Franco would emerge triumphant from the Civil War, and such a Government would undoubtedly object to the scheme. It was to be expected that Italy would actively support them in their objections. He felt, therefore, that it would be better to try to come to some arrangement with General Franco's Government than to be taken to court over the matter either at The Hague or at Geneva, since the latter course would certainly involve very long delays. We might, therefore, gain more time by waiting a little until a stable Government was established in Spain and then attempting to make some friendly arrangement with it.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN asked what the Law Officers meant by the phrase "initial steps" in the last paragraph of their letter.

LORD SWINTON said he understood this to mean the issuing of tenders and starting work on the site.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN thought that it would be unwise to go so far as to place contracts and then have to deal with objections by the Spanish Government. He agreed that it was necessary to put the scheme through, but thought that a full Appreciation of the political factors involved should be prepared by the Foreign Office and that we should proceed with some caution in the matter.

SIR ROBERT VANSITTART stressed the probability of avoiding delay if we waited until the Franco Government was established in Spain. General Franco would, no doubt, want to obtain our assistance and support in many matters, and it would be a good opportunity to say to him that we were proposing to proceed with the reclamation scheme then.

SIR SAMUEL HOARE enquired what would happen supposing General Franco made difficulties. He trusted that this would not mean abandoning the whole scheme.

MR. ORMSBY GORE thought there was every chance of getting the scheme through without serious opposition from Spain, if we proceeded in the way suggested by Sir Robert Vansittart.

LORD SWINTON agreed that an Appreciation by the Foreign Office of the political factors involved was obviously desirable. The real problem was to find the best way of implementing the scheme with the least possible delay.

SIR SAMUEL HOARE doubted whether we should find any Spanish Government at all forthcoming in this matter.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN suggested that we might have to face the possibility of the Spaniards retaliating by reclaiming an area adjacent to their Neutral Ground alongside the aerodrome.

LORD SWINTON enquired whether the Committee would agree to the Air Ministry calling for tenders for the scheme.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN thought that it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to keep the matter secret if tenders were called for. He thought it would be most unwise.

#### CONCLUSIONS.

THE COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE agreed—

- (a) That the provision of an air base at Gibraltar is essential for the needs of Imperial defence.
- (b) That the only practicable site for an aerodrome is that of the proposed reclamation on the west side of the British Neutral Ground.
- (c) To take note that reclamation work on the site proposed will almost certainly cause reactions in Spain, whatever Government may be in power.
- (d) To take note that in the opinion of the Law Officers we have a *prima facie* case to take whatever initial steps are considered appropriate pending objection by the Spanish Government.



- (e) That the best method of carrying through the scheme, whether by proceeding at once without any reference to Spain or by waiting to negotiate with whatever Spanish Government emerges from the present Civil War, is a question of policy which can only be decided by the Cabinet.
- (f) To invite the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to circulate to the Cabinet an Appreciation of the political factors involved in such a decision by the Cabinet.
- (g) To ask the Secretary to submit the Committee's recommendations, together with the opinion of the Law Officers of the Crown and all other relevant Papers, for the consideration of the Cabinet.
- (h) That no steps toward implementing the scheme should be taken by the Air Ministry pending the Cabinet decision referred to in (e).

\* \* \* \* \*

2 Whitehall Gardens, S.W. 1,  
October 29, 1936.

East (and thence, if necessary, onwards by the Imperial air routes) and *vice versa* otherwise than by the Cape route. The consequent delays might vitally affect the opening phases of a campaign and would seriously embarrass us throughout a major war.

5. Moreover, the provision of a land and sea aerodrome at Gibraltar could not fail to be of great advantage to civil aviation also. In the event of the Mediterranean and Central Europe being closed to us, the route via Gibraltar to West Africa would provide the only possible means of linking up with the African and Eastern air routes. Although it is apparent that in such a case the long flights involved would seriously reduce, if not entirely absorb, the pay load normally available, yet this fact would be of minor importance compared with the prime necessity of maintaining a line of communication which would be essential to us in the circumstances envisaged.

*Difficulty of finding a suitable site.*

6. The problem of finding a suitable site for an aerodrome and an air base at Gibraltar, however, presents many serious difficulties, arising primarily from the extremely restricted space available. The Rock itself has no level ground which could be utilised for the purpose, and it is therefore necessary to look elsewhere. It seems that there are only three possible sites :—

- (a) On land to be acquired from Spain adjacent to British territory.
- (b) On the British Neutral Ground.
- (c) On an area to be reclaimed from the sea.

*A site on Spanish territory.*

7. The possibility of acquiring land from Spain was investigated by the Foreign Office, and the opinion of His Majesty's Ambassador at Madrid on the question was obtained. The prospects of success in this direction are remote. Spanish national feeling is extremely sensitive about our occupation of Gibraltar, and any attempt on our part to extend the area of our occupation would be bitterly resented. It seems that the price of Spanish consent to such a scheme would be so high as to be prohibitive, even if it were possible to offer some adequate *quid pro quo*—and, in fact, it is difficult to think what offer we could make. Even supposing, however, the Spaniards could be induced to consider such a proposition, the negotiations would inevitably be prolonged and intricate, and serious delays would occur before work on the construction of the air base could be started. Moreover, the defence of such a base would raise very difficult problems. The Committee do not, therefore, consider that any useful purpose would be served by further pursuing this line of enquiry.

*The British Neutral Ground Site.*

8. An emergency landing ground for the Fleet Air Arm has recently been prepared on the British Neutral Ground north of the Rock in accordance with a recommendation of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1933 (C.I.D. 258th Meeting, Minute 8). Apart from the political considerations involved, however, which are dealt with later on in this Memorandum, there are the following objections to the use of this site as a permanent aerodrome :—

- (i) The British Neutral Ground comprises almost the only level ground in the Colony, and the construction of an aerodrome on it would involve not only the closing of the rifle ranges, but also the sacrifice of practically all the training and recreational facilities of the garrison.
- (ii) The width available is not enough to provide anything more than an east-west runway. There would therefore be many occasions on which it would be hazardous or impossible for aircraft to make use of the aerodrome. This would be particularly undesirable in a key aerodrome used for long-distance flights, since there is no other landing ground near which aircraft could reach if, when nearing the limit of their endurance, they found landing conditions unsafe or impossible. In the case of reinforcement flights of whole squadrons, this objection would be of even greater weight.

- (iii) The main road from Spain would have to be taken underground below the aerodrome in a tunnel which would be below sea level and liable to flooding.
- (iv) There would be no possibility of extending the aerodrome except by reclamation from the sea. It should be noted that, in any case, a small strip on the western side would have to be reclaimed and added to the existing ground in order to give the necessary length.

*The Reclamation Scheme.*

9. In view of these difficulties in the way of the construction of an air base on any existing dry land at Gibraltar, the Committee considered that the proposal for using an area reclaimed from the sea should be examined, and invited the Air Ministry to go into it in detail. A reconnaissance was carried out, and several possible schemes investigated. The scheme which the Air Ministry recommended, after detailed examination of all the possible alternatives, was the reclamation of the area shown on the attached map to the north-west of the Rock at Commercial Harbour. This area would provide a landing ground suitable for all winds, with a maximum length of 1,100 yards, and a minimum of 600 yards in a north-easterly and south-westerly direction, *i.e.*, the ones which aircraft would use least often in view of the direction of the prevailing winds. Space would also be available for aerodrome buildings, workshops, barracks, &c., without disturbing existing accommodation. It is estimated that the reclamation of this area could be accomplished without any special difficulties from the engineering point of view within a period of two years, at an approximate cost of £451,000. It should be understood that the scheme is flexible within certain limits as regards the actual area to be reclaimed, and that it is not necessarily confined exactly to the boundaries shown on the map.

*Legal Difficulties vis-à-vis Spain.*

10. So far only the technical and topographical factors involved in this problem have been considered. But there are also political considerations in this matter which are perhaps of overriding importance. These arise mainly from the fact that the legal position regarding our rights in the British Neutral Ground and the territorial waters round the whole Colony is not free from doubt. The questions at issue were examined by the Foreign Office and explained to the Joint Oversea and Home Defence Committee in considerable detail. Briefly, it appears that the Spanish Government have never explicitly acknowledged that we possess any rights in the British Neutral Ground, nor even in the waters adjacent to the Colony itself. Rightly or wrongly, we have exercised such rights, with very little serious protest from Spain, ever since the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 in the case of the territorial waters, and since 1838 in the case of what is now known as the British Neutral Ground. But there has never, so far as can be seen, been any agreement between the two countries on these points, and both sides have been content to maintain their own views in principle and to avoid, so far as possible, any open dispute. It seems probable, therefore, that in law we should have a strong case for maintaining that we had acquired these rights by prescription. It is necessary, however, to anticipate the possibility, or even the probability, that should any scheme be launched which would raise the definite issue, the Spanish Government would make our action a diplomatic issue and might even demand that the whole question should be referred to the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague. The reclamation scheme, therefore, has the disadvantage that whatever may be our legal title to the Neutral Ground, our title to an area reclaimed from the sea adjacent to it cannot be better, and since our title to territorial waters anywhere at Gibraltar is not admitted by Spain, it may be worse. The risk of obtaining an unfavourable decision when there are two uncertain factors, as in this case, must necessarily be somewhat greater.

*Special Considerations regarding the Territorial Water Issue.*

11. While the question of our rights in the British Neutral Ground depends on a comparatively clear issue (*i.e.*, whether our prescriptive claim would prevail),

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B 2

the question of the extent of territorial waters is a good deal more complicated. On the assumption, however, that the International Tribunal found in our favour regarding rights in the Neutral Ground, it is considered, though it is impossible to forecast with any certainty what award would be made, that the Spanish thesis (*i.e.*, that we possess no territorial waters at all at Gibraltar) would be unlikely to be upheld and that the award would probably be based on some division of the waters starting from the point at which the northern boundary of the British Neutral Ground reaches the sea on the western side. Three possible dividing lines on such a basis are shown on the attached map. Of these the "worst case" indicated by the straight line C-D is perhaps unlikely to be chosen. In this case, however, it would not be possible to provide an area of the required dimensions without encroaching on the North Front and the British Neutral Ground, though from the purely engineering point of view there would be no difficulty.

*Disadvantages of the Probable Award regarding Territorial Waters.*

12. It should be pointed out that the territorial waters at Gibraltar so far claimed by His Majesty's Government extend considerably beyond any of the three lines on the attached map, and that since 1826 we have never admitted any Spanish claim to jurisdiction east of a line drawn from Punta Mala. Any of the decisions envisaged on the map would therefore involve a considerable restriction of the water area in which His Majesty's Government at present claim and exercise territorial jurisdiction, and any of them would place a large section of the existing commercial anchorage under Spanish sovereignty. Apart from any difficulties in peace time which would follow from such a decision, relatively serious complications might well arise in any future war in which we were belligerent and Spain neutral. In the last war there was insufficient accommodation within the harbour for all the shipping calling at Gibraltar. It was, in fact, found impossible to avoid using anchorages, at times even west of Punta Mala, for purposes, *inter alia*, of convoy assembly and to accommodate vessels sent in for examination for which there was no room in the examination anchorage. It is thought improbable that, in any future major European war at least, we should be able to forgo the use of these anchorages for similar purposes again.

13. The following are suggested, therefore, as exemplifying the disadvantages which might result in war time if there had been a binding award on the lines contemplated:—

- (a) it would be more difficult for Spain to resist pressure from our enemy to deny us by force the use of waters outside the award limits (though it is considered unlikely that any attempt to do so would be made).
- (b) in any event, if Spain were apprehensive about her neutrality, continued friction and protests would be inevitable.
- (c) even if Spain made no serious protest, our use of waters beyond the limit for such purposes as are indicated above would provide a good excuse for the enemy if he desired to make use of other neutral waters.

14. Nevertheless, the Committee are of opinion that the importance of providing an air base at Gibraltar is such as to necessitate our taking the risk that its construction may lead to difficulties of this kind. So long as there is no award on the subject no serious difficulty is anticipated as we could probably justify our use of the waters in war time on the grounds of our prescriptive rights and any dispute would most likely be held over until the end of hostilities for judicial settlement, if this was insisted on.

*Possibility of minor infringements of Spanish territorial air.*

15. There is a further minor difficulty of a political nature which would arise whether the aerodrome were established on the Neutral Ground or on the reclaimed area. In certain states of the wind Spanish territoriality might occasionally be infringed by aircraft on their way to and from the aerodrome. Such infringements would be infrequent and only momentary, and it is considered that if the Spanish Government objected the matter could be dealt with by the ordinary methods of diplomatic protest and apology.

*Conclusions.*

16. The opinion of the Law Officers of the Crown on all the legal questions is to be obtained by the Foreign Office, and the final decision cannot of course be made until this opinion has been received. It was strongly represented to the Committee by the Air Ministry, however, that the whole scheme must be put in hand with the least possible delay if the construction of the air base at Gibraltar is to proceed concurrently with the provision of aircraft capable of making use of it. The Committee therefore considered the proposals which had been submitted on the assumption that we should have a good case in law for using either the Neutral Ground site or the area proposed for reclamation on the west of it. Such an assumption, in the view of the Foreign Office, and subject, of course, to the opinion of the Law Officers, was by no means unjustifiable.

The Committee felt that the objections to the Neutral Ground site were so serious that they could not recommend its use. They therefore decided, in order to avoid delay, to seek the approval in principle of the Committee of Imperial Defence, subject always to the overriding opinion of the Law Officers on the legal position, to the construction of an aerodrome on the reclaimed area, the exact size and shape of which would have to be determined at a later stage.

## SUMMARY.

17. The position may be summed up as follows:—

- (i) An air base is urgently required at Gibraltar to complete the chain of air bases on the Imperial air route to the East, since the performance of Service aircraft will shortly enable them to reach Gibraltar in one bound from home.
- (ii) The prospects of obtaining a site from Spain on Spanish territory within a reasonable time, if at all, are so remote as to be unworthy of further consideration.
- (iii) Use of the British Neutral Ground for the purpose is open to most serious objections from the military, technical and topographical point of view.
- (iv) The reclamation of an area from the sea on the west of the British Neutral Ground offers by far the most satisfactory solution of the problem.
- (v) The legal position regarding British rights in the British Neutral Ground and the territorial waters adjacent is obscure. Since Spain might take the question to The Hague Court, the legal opinion of the Law Officers of the Crown on the matter is necessary. This is to be obtained.
- (vi) Meanwhile three possible lines for an award by The Hague Court regarding the division of territorial waters are shown on the attached map. In the worst case, which is considered unlikely to arise, it would not be possible to reclaim a sufficient area without encroaching on the British Neutral Ground—a course which, to a greater or lesser extent, would be open to the objections referred to in sub-paragraph (iii) above.
- (vii) So long as there is no award on the subject no serious difficulty is anticipated, but an award regarding the extent of territorial waters on the lines considered likely would restrict our use of anchorages in the commercial harbour, and might have certain real disadvantages in a war in which we were belligerent and Spain neutral. Unless, however, overwhelming objections on this score emerge upon receipt of the Law Officers' opinion, the Committee consider that these disadvantages should not be allowed to prejudice the scheme for an air base, which is of the utmost importance.
- (viii) There is a possibility of occasional minor infringements of Spanish territoriality by aircraft using the air base, but the Committee consider that these would not be sufficiently serious as to be difficult of settlement by ordinary diplomatic means.

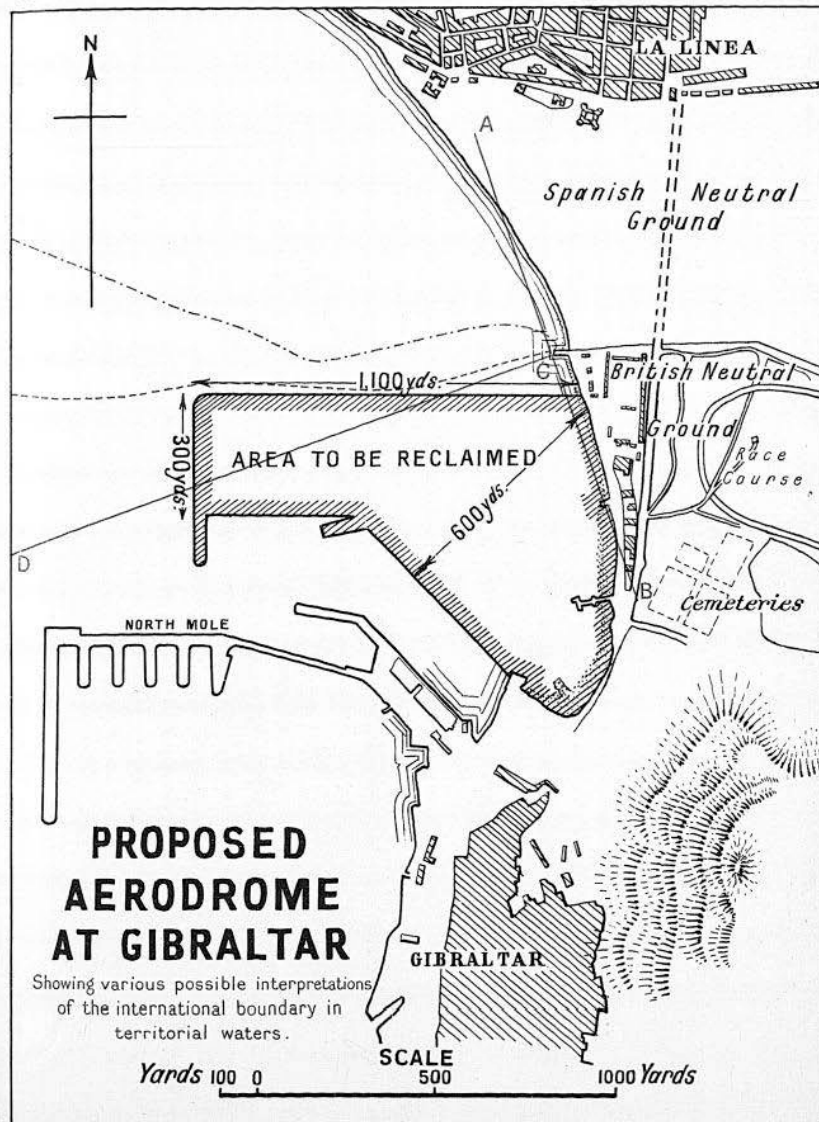


- (ix) The Committee recommend that, subject always to the overriding opinion of the Law Officers on the legal position, and to further consideration of the financial aspects of the scheme when a closer estimate of the total cost of the air base has been framed, the Committee of Imperial Defence should approve in principle the scheme for the establishment of an air base at Gibraltar on a site reclaimed from the sea, as shown on the attached map, or such modification of it as may be necessitated by the legal determination of the boundary between British and Spanish territorial waters, with the proviso that the matter shall be reconsidered before any scheme is finally decided which necessitates encroachment upon the British Neutral Ground or North Front.

V. DYKES, *Joint Secretary,*  
*Joint Oversea and Home Defence Committee.*

2 Whitehall Gardens, S.W. 1,  
July 24, 1936.

SECRET



Map Section A.M. No. 858

AB:- General trend of the coast.

CD:- Perpendicular to AB.

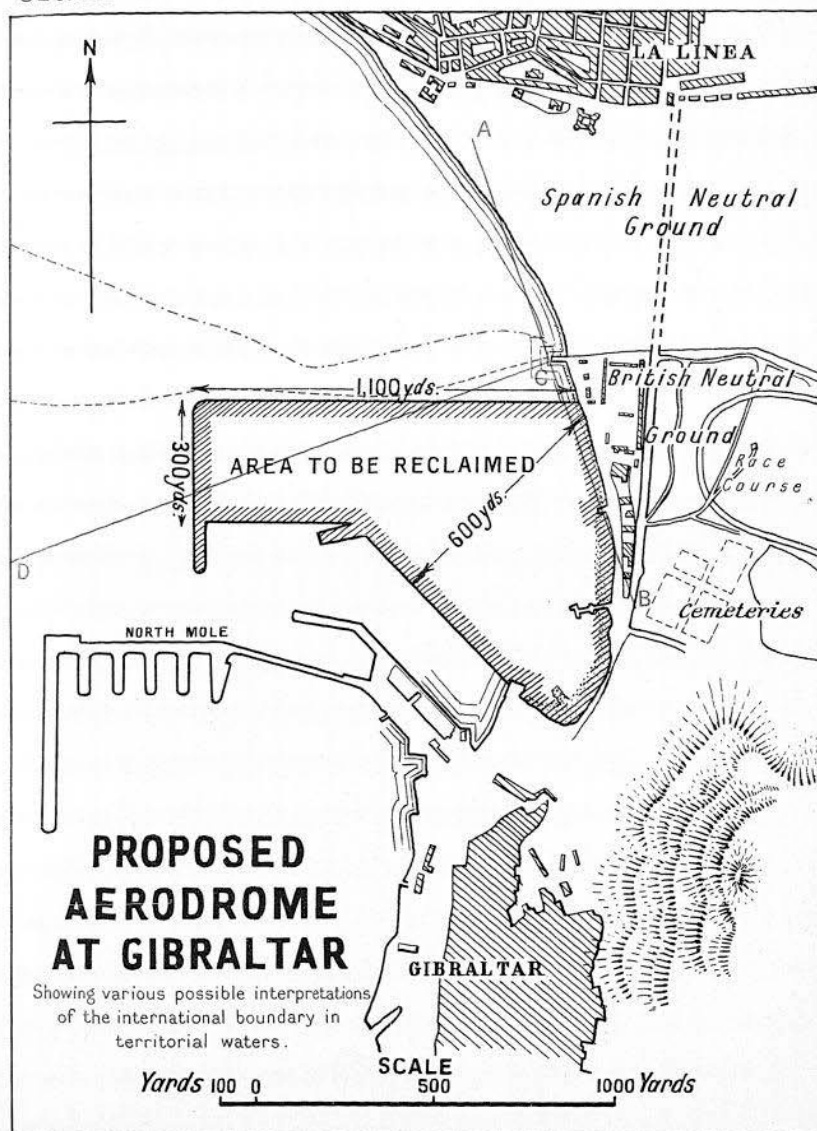
All points on chain dotted line are equi-distant from British and Spanish coasts. (North Mole is included)

All points on dotted line are equi-distant from points at equal intervals along the foreshore of the British and Spanish coasts excluding the North Mole. It is assumed that the Spanish neutral ground is Spanish territory & British neutral ground, British territory.

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SECRET



Map Section A.M. No. 858

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*Printed for the Committee of Imperial Defence. July 1936.*

SECRET.

Copy No. 20

COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE.

*Extract from the Minutes of the 281st Meeting, held on July 30, 1936.*

(1)—GIBRALTAR AS A LINK IN IMPERIAL AIR COMMUNICATIONS:  
THE PROBLEM OF ESTABLISHING AN AIR BASE.

(C.I.D. Paper No. 424-C.)

(Previous reference: C.I.D. Minutes of the 258th Meeting, Minute 8.)

THE COMMITTEE had under consideration a Memorandum by the Joint Oversea and Home Defence Committee (C.I.D. Paper No. 424-C) submitting certain proposals for the establishment of an air base at Gibraltar.

SIR MAURICE HANKEY, Chairman of the Joint Oversea and Home Defence Committee, introduced the Memorandum at the request of the Chairman. He explained that the rapid development in aircraft makes the early provision of an air base at Gibraltar essential in order to complete our strategic air route to the East in which Gibraltar was a key point. It had not been possible before for service aircraft to reach Gibraltar in one flight, but the provision of aircraft which would be able to accomplish this was now well within sight. The problem of finding ground for an aerodrome at Gibraltar, however, was a difficult one. Four possibilities had been considered. The use of ground obtained from Spain was one possible solution, but after examination by the Foreign Office this had been ruled out. The possibility of reclaiming an area on the east side of the Rock had also been considered, but there were serious technical objections from the air point of view to such a site, owing to the air currents from the Rock. The only flat ground in British hands was on what was known as the British Neutral Ground. An aerodrome on this ground would not be satisfactory from the air point of view, and moreover it would involve the closing of the rifle ranges and the loss of all the ground available for training and recreational purposes at Gibraltar. The fourth possible solution, which seemed to be most promising, was that of reclaiming an area, as shown on the map attached to the Paper under consideration, on the west side of the British Neutral Ground at an estimated cost of about £451,000. In this there would be no technical difficulties, but there would be certain political and legal difficulties. Our legal rights in the British Neutral Ground and in the waters adjacent to Gibraltar are obscure, and have never been satisfactorily settled with Spain. We have, however, enjoyed our rights in the surrounding waters ever since the Treaty of Utrecht, and in the British Neutral Ground for about the last hundred years. Nevertheless, there was a possibility that Spain would take us to the Hague Court over the question. The Foreign Office, however, were of opinion that we should have a very good case in law as having acquired these rights by prescription, though it would be necessary, of course, to obtain the Law Officers' opinion on this matter. Should the case go to the Hague Court, and the international boundary in the territorial waters adjacent to the British Neutral Ground be definitely determined, there was the possibility that our present use of the Commercial Harbour would be interfered with. Three possible lines for this boundary were shown on the sketch map. In the last War we had in fact used, without protest from Spain, the water to the north of these possible boundaries, and to be deprived of it would be a serious inconvenience. There was, therefore, a definite risk that the final settlement of the boundaries by an International Court would jeopardise our whole position in those waters. Should the line marked as C-D on the sketch map be decided by the Court as the boundary,

[13614—1]

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Copy No.

52

429-C.

# COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE.

## GIBRALTAR AS A LINK IN IMPERIAL COMMUNICATIONS: RECLAMATION OF LAND FROM THE SEA FOR THE PURPOSE OF A MILITARY AERODROME.

(Previous C.I.D. Paper No. 428-C.)

*Copy of a Letter from the Law Officers of the Crown to the Secretary of State  
for Foreign Affairs.*

*Royal Courts of Justice,  
October 20, 1936.*

Sir,

WE were honoured with your commands signified to us in Mr. Walter Roberts' letter\* of the 18th September, 1936, requesting our opinion on the question whether His Majesty's Government could successfully establish their right to carry out a proposal for the reclamation of land from the sea at Gibraltar for the purpose of a military aerodrome.

We have taken the matter into our consideration and, in obedience to your commands, have the honour to REPORT—

THAT we think that the question to be considered first is whether the British Government could construct the air base on the existing British neutral ground. We agree that a claim to do this can only be based on a jurisdiction acquired since and independently of the Treaty of Utrecht. It was apparently in 1838 that we pushed the line of sentries forward to the present boundary or thereabouts, and "we made a great acquisition of Territory" (see Sir Robert Gardiner's statement, Bundle 2, pp. 4 and 5). It is not clear whether the Law Officers' Opinion of 1838 was written with reference to the territory "acquired" in that year or such portions as had been occupied prior to that advance. If it referred to the territory occupied in that year it looks as if there must have been some misunderstanding.

It is unnecessary to recapitulate the various incidents which followed, but seventy years after this acquisition the Note Verbale of the 5th August, 1908, written with reference to the unclimbable fence seems to disclaim any right in the British Government to construct any "military or defensive" work on the land. This would be presumably on the basis that the land was neutral, and the rights claimed were limited rights, though we think not very easy to define. Events during and since the war have undoubtedly strengthened the British claim. In particular we were shown a letter\* of the 25th August, 1915, written with reference to the landing of an aeroplane in the Spanish neutral area, which appears to recognise without objection the "aeroplane service in the said fortress." As we understand it the aeroplanes landed on the area in question and the letter might be read as recognising this area as part of the fortress or at least as agreeing to the use of the land for aeroplanes.

The present proposal, we understand, is not only to create necessary facilities for the Fortress itself and its defence but to provide a base of strategic value to our defences further afield.

\* Not reproduced.

[14011]

Having considered the documents before us we think that each side might put its case in two ways.

The Spanish Government might claim, firstly, that the land although in British occupation for ordinary administrative purposes remained neutral, and that although they had conceded or acquiesced in its use for certain defensive purposes connected with the Fortress in the past, they had a right to give or withhold their consent for any new work or fresh use.

Alternatively, if they must be taken to have conceded its use for any defensive purpose immediately connected with the Fortress, the present proposal, they would say, went beyond such a concession.

The British Government would claim, firstly, that the area had passed under full British sovereignty. They would point to the *de facto* position and rely particularly on events during and since the war.

Alternatively, they might put forward a claim that the air base was primarily for the defence of the Fortress as a Mediterranean Fortress and could again rely under this head on the past facts as to aeroplanes using the land and the letter already referred to.

Before stating our general conclusion we will deal with the other points raised. It is suggested, on the assumption that the land to be reclaimed is at present submerged by British territorial waters, that this might entitle the British Government to claim greater rights over this area than they have over the present area. We do not think this suggestion sound. On the contrary, we think the fact that it is necessary to reclaim land and that such reclamation would, on the British Government's case, diminish the area of Spanish Territorial waters would assist the Spanish Government in their case. No doubt apart from special circumstances a country having possession of a territory is entitled to reclaim land and exercise over such land the rights whether of full or limited sovereignty which it possesses over the territory to which the land is added. Special circumstances might well be held to exist in this case and the Spanish Government might further rely on the reclamation as supporting the contention that the British Government were making a new claim. The fact that on one view the reclaimed land might cover a small portion of Spanish Territorial waters can, we think, be disregarded.

We are asked whether the British Government could successfully establish their claim before an International Tribunal. The only certainty we feel about the matter is that the case is a difficult one and on the evidence before us the issue is doubtful. There is evidence to support either view and an International Tribunal in a case like this which raises very difficult issues in very special circumstances has necessarily a considerable latitude to give more or less weight to this or that consideration. If a clear assurance is desired that the British Government case would succeed we could not give such an assurance. If all that is required is an assurance that the British Government have a *prima facie* case entitling them to take whatever initial steps are considered appropriate pending objection by the Spanish Government, we think they have such a case. We think it would be premature and of little value if we attempted to express an opinion as to chances of success until the nature and basis of the Spanish Government's objections, if any, have been disclosed. The more the scheme can be related to the actual needs of the Fortress, although the base may incidentally be available for other purposes, the greater will be the chances of success.

We have, &c.  
(Signed) D. B. SOMERVELL.  
T. O'CONNOR.

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*Printed for the Committee of Imperial Defence. October 1936.*

SECRET.

Copy No. 56

428-C.

COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE.

GIBRALTAR AS A LINK IN IMPERIAL COMMUNICATIONS. THE  
PROBLEM OF ESTABLISHING AN AIR BASE.

(Previous C.I.D. Paper No. 424-C.)

*Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Air.*

AT their 281st Meeting\* on the 30th July, 1936, the Committee of Imperial Defence considered the project for the establishment of an air base at Gibraltar, and approved it in principle subject to the overriding opinion of the Law Officers of the Crown on the legal position and to further consideration of the financial aspects.

It was then decided that no actual work should be started at Gibraltar until the Law Officers had given a favourable opinion as to our legal position.

The opinion of the Law Officers of the Crown has now been received. In view of the great urgency of this vital requirement, which has already been explained to the Committee, and of the opinion of the Law Officers that "the British Government have a *prima facie* case entitling them to take whatever initial steps are considered appropriate pending objection by the Spanish Government," I now ask the Committee for authority to proceed with the work forthwith.

(Initialled) S.

*Air Ministry, October 27, 1936.*

\* C.I.D./281st Meeting, Minute 1.

[14002]

## **APPENDIX C.**

### **IMPERIAL DEFENCE REPORT, OCTOBER 1937**

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S E C R E T.

C.P. 259 (37).

COPY NO. 41

C A B I N E T.

SITUATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND  
MIDDLE EAST.

Memorandum by the Minister for  
Co-ordination of Defence.

In accordance with Cabinet 38(37) Conclusion 6, the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee have had under consideration "whether any steps of a military character, and if so, what steps, could be taken at the present time in view of all the circumstances, with a view to increasing our prestige in the Near and Middle East".

2. A Report by the Chiefs of Staff on the above subject<sup>\*</sup> was considered by the Committee of Imperial Defence at a meeting held on 28th October, 1937.

3. A copy of the conclusions of the Committee of Imperial Defence and of the Report by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee<sup>\*</sup> are circulated herewith for consideration by the Cabinet.

(Initialled) T.W.H.I.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.1,

29th October, 1937.

\* C.I.D. 300th Meeting, Minute 6.

\* C.I.D. Paper No. 1364-B (also Paper No. C.O.S. 635).



Printed for the Committee of Imperial Defence. October 1937.

SECRET

Copy No 99

1364-B.

(Also Paper No. C.O.S. 635.)

### COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE.

#### SITUATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE MIDDLE EAST.

(Previous C.I.D. Paper No. 1350-B.)

##### *Report by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee.*

ON the 16th October, 1937, the Chief of Naval Staff received two telegrams from the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, reporting that the local Commanders of the three Forces (who had assembled in Egypt under instructions from the Chiefs of Staff to examine certain plans) were concerned at the deterioration in the international situation, and, in particular, at the despatch of Italian troops to Libya, and the intention of the Italian Government to appoint Signor Parini as the Italian Minister in Egypt.

2. We met, as a matter of urgency, on the 18th October, 1937, and submitted a Report (Annex I) in which we summarised our conclusions as follows:—

- (i) The provision of fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft defences in Egypt is in itself eminently desirable and would be a valuable factor in establishing confidence in Egypt and stabilising the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, but in present conditions cannot be considered independently of the international situation as a whole.
- (ii) From a purely military point of view, we are aware of no new factor in the situation which leads us to consider that the military situation is such as to justify a change in our existing instructions that no obtrusive measures should be taken in connection with the defence of Egypt or in the projected movements of the Fleet.
- (iii) We note the opinion of the Foreign Office that the political situation in the Mediterranean at the present time is such as to justify further measures to increase the security of Egypt against Italian aggression. But we presume that the position is likely to develop one way or the other as the result of the meetings of the Committee on Non-Intervention in Spain now in progress.
- (iv) Italy's present commitments and pre-occupations in Abyssinia and in Spain, her adverse economic and financial position and the unpreparedness of her ground forces in Libya, at the present time, for offensive operations in the Western Desert, make it improbable that she would embark single-handed on offensive action directed against Egypt.
- (v) The despatch of any forces from this country must inevitably weaken our position *vis-à-vis* Germany, and we have always considered that we should take no action which would result in a diversion of our limited resources from our main objective, which is the security of this country against German aggression.

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B

(vi) We have despatched an interim reply to the Local Commander-in-Chief in Egypt (Enclosure No. 4), but a decision of the Cabinet is now required on the following points:—

- (a) Has the political situation *vis-à-vis* Italy deteriorated at the present time, or is it likely to do so in the immediate future as a result of a breakdown in the negotiations of the Committee of Non-Intervention in Spain, to such an extent as to warrant a departure from our present instructions for taking no obtrusive measures for the additional security of Egypt?
- (b) If the above is the case—

- (1) should authority be given to the Local Commanders to take all the measures possible with the existing resources in or near Egypt, *i.e.*, those referred to in paragraph 2 (ii) to (vi) above;
- (2) should forces be despatched from the United Kingdom at the cost of weakening our anti-aircraft defence at home in the event of German aggression or an extension of trouble in the Mediterranean to northern Europe in such degree as to menace the United Kingdom?

(vii) From the time when a decision is taken to despatch reinforcements from this country to the time when their presence will become effective in Egypt, a period, in time of peace, of about six weeks must be allowed.

3. The Minister for Co-ordination of Defence circulated the above Report to the Cabinet, and it was considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on the 20th October.

4. The Cabinet agreed\*—

- “(a) That the answer to the question in the conclusion (vi) (a)<sup>†</sup> of the Chiefs of Staff Report should be in the negative, that is to say, that the political situation *vis-à-vis* Italy had not deteriorated at the present time to such an extent as to warrant a departure from present instructions for taking no obtrusive measures for the additional security of Egypt; the questions raised in (vi) (b) therefore did not arise.
- (b) That the Committee of Imperial Defence should be asked to consider whether any steps of a military character, and, if so, what steps, could be taken at the present time in view of all the circumstances, with a view to increasing our prestige in the Near and Middle East.”

5. By the instructions of the Prime Minister we have examined conclusion (b) above, with a view to submitting our recommendations to the Committee of Imperial Defence.

6. Despite the assurance quoted in paragraph 4 (a) above, we should be failing in our duty if we did not emphasise that our military position in Egypt is extremely unsatisfactory, particularly as far as defensive arrangements against air attack and the protection of the Port of Alexandria as the fleet base are concerned. There are no anti-aircraft guns or searchlights, and no fighter aircraft. In the event of a sudden deterioration in the international situation, no reinforcements of this nature could arrive in under six weeks. Although if an aircraft carrier could be made available fighter aircraft could be conveyed to Egypt in about a fortnight, as already provided for in Part I of the Middle East Appreciation (Paper No. C.O.S. 603 (J.P.)). In these circumstances, we sympathise with the concern which has been expressed by the local Commanders charged with the responsibility for the security of Egypt.

Nevertheless, as stated in paragraph 2 (v) above, the despatch of any forces from this country must inevitably weaken our position *vis-à-vis* Germany, and disturb military training. We have been guided by the principle that we should

\* Cabinet 38 (37), Conclusion 6.

† See paragraph 2 (vi) (a) above.

take no action not absolutely avoidable which would result in a diversion of our limited resources from our main objective, which is the security of this country against German aggression.

7. Turning now to the specific problem referred to us (see paragraph 5), we would point out that "any steps of a military character" which "could be taken at the present time, in view of all the circumstances, with a view to increasing our prestige in the Near and Middle East" must be limited by two conditions. In the first place, they must not be liable to be construed by the Italian Government as provocative; in the second place, they must not appreciably weaken our position *vis-à-vis* Germany.

8. In view of these limitations, it is clear that nothing very spectacular can be done. Nevertheless, there are certain measures which are at present contemplated and, in addition, certain other measures, which we suggest might now be taken, which, in their cumulative effect, will tend to strengthen our position in Egypt both morally and materially. These we set out in the following paragraphs.

9. At the present time our air forces in the Middle East are equipped with aircraft whose performance is notoriously inferior to that of the aircraft with which the Italian air forces are equipped. The Chief of the Air Staff has informed us, however, that re-equipment of three of our bomber squadrons in the Middle East and Iraq with the latest type of aircraft is already in hand, and that the first instalment of eight of these aircraft is being despatched to Egypt on the 27th October. Further consignments are to follow at regular intervals. The knowledge of this re-equipment is bound to become public property in Egypt and throughout the Middle East generally, and should have a good effect in that part of the world.

10. The local Commanders in Egypt are clearly apprehensive lest the situation in Palestine should make demands on their exiguous forces. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff has assured us, however, that arrangements have been made to ensure that any troops that may be despatched to Palestine from Egypt will be immediately replaced from elsewhere. If this were announced, it should have a reassuring effect.

11. In addition, it will be recalled that the Committee of Imperial Defence at its last meeting before the Recess\* agreed "to invite the Secretary of State for India to inform the Government of India that, for the time being, reinforcements for Egypt should be given priority over all other reinforcement commitments which the Government of India have conditionally accepted." This information, if communicated to the local Commanders, should at least be of some comfort to them.

12. We have been informed that the Egyptian authorities themselves favour the early reoccupation of Mersa Matruh with Egyptian troops. We cannot conceive that there can be the slightest political objection to this move of Egyptian troops within their own country. We have therefore instructed, in anticipation of Ministerial approval, the General Officer Commanding British troops in Egypt that, although he should not himself broach the subject, he should encourage the Egyptian authorities to make this move if they themselves should propose it.

13. The Air Officer Commanding, Middle East, has suggested that petrol and bomb dumps should be established in the Western Desert. We think that this would be a sound precaution, and we recommend that the suggestion should be sanctioned on the understanding that local Commanders are satisfied that the dumps in question can be properly safeguarded.

14. The S.S. *Thistlegarth* is at present lying at Alexandria with anti-torpedo nets and 6-inch, 4-inch and 2-pdr. guns in her hold, which could be used for the defence of Alexandria in an emergency. We recommend that the nets should be disembarked and stored ashore at Alexandria, if possible.

\* C.I.D. 298th Meeting, Minute 1.

15. As regards the 6-inch guns, there are at present no coast defences at Alexandria, but the hold-fasts for two 6-inch guns, mounted there during the 1935 crisis, still remain, and platforms for the other two guns are in S.S. *Thistlegarth*. At their 275th Meeting\* the Committee of Imperial Defence agreed that—

“It is in the general interest that Alexandria should be a defended port, and if a treaty is negotiated under which we continue to maintain a garrison in or near Alexandria, the defences would well be manned by the Egyptians.”

16. We are concerned at the continued lack of any form of coast defences at Alexandria, and we have considered whether it would not be advisable to enter into immediate negotiations with the Egyptian Government as to the transfer to them for mounting at Alexandria of the guns and lights now in the S.S. *Thistlegarth*.

17. We understand, however, that it has been suggested that the handing over of guns for Alexandria might form a useful bargaining factor in connection with the forthcoming negotiations with the Egyptian Government concerning the improvement of harbour facilities and provision of a dock at Alexandria.

18. If this is the case (and on this point we suggest that the local authorities should be consulted), we suggest that the guns and lights in *Thistlegarth* should in any case be disembarked and stored at Alexandria pending the outcome of the negotiations. We point out that, in the meanwhile, the S.S. *Thistlegarth* is incurring heavy demurrage charges while she remains at Alexandria.

19. Four six-inch guns, six searchlights and ammunition for the defence of the Canal terminal ports are at present stored at Malta. We recommend that arrangements should be made for their storage in Egypt. Since no part of the Suez Canal Defence Plan has yet been divulged to the Egyptian Government, no indication of the intended use of this equipment should be given at this juncture, and it should be alluded to as reserve equipment for British Forces in Egypt. For a similar reason, it would be more appropriate for the equipment to be stored at Alexandria than in the otherwise more satisfactory Canal Zone Area.

20. S.S. *Churruca* is at present in the Eastern Mediterranean with ammunition in her holds for the gun defences of Alexandria. We recommend that this ammunition could be disembarked and stored in Egypt.

21. The interim telegram which has been despatched to General Officer Commanding British troops in Egypt for communication to his colleagues, is attached as Annex II.

22. The question of propaganda is hardly within the category of military measures. We suggest, however, that any action which could be taken to expedite the arrangements which, we understand are already under consideration for establishing an effective British Propaganda Service in the Middle East, would have a beneficial effect on our prestige in that area.

#### *Summary of Conclusions.*

23. Our conclusions and recommendations are as follows:—

- (a) We reaffirm and invite particular attention to the following extract from the Report which was submitted to the Cabinet on the 18th October, 1937 (see paragraph 2 (i) above):—

The provision of fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft defences in Egypt is in itself eminently desirable, and would be a valuable factor in establishing confidence in Egypt and stabilising the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, but in present conditions cannot be considered independently of the international situation as a whole.

\* C.I.D. 275th Meeting, Minute 4 (i) (a).



- (b) In view of the Cabinet decision quoted in paragraph 4 (a) above, any steps of a military character which could be taken at the present time in view of all the circumstances, with a view to increasing our prestige in the Near and Middle East must be limited by two conditions: first, that they must not be liable to be construed by the Italian Government as provocative; and, secondly, they must not appreciably weaken our position *vis-à-vis* Germany.
- (c) In view of the above limitations nothing very spectacular can be done, but the measures summarised in conclusions (d) and (e) below should, in their cumulative effect, tend to strengthen our position in Egypt both morally and materially.
- (d) The following measures are already in hand or contemplated:—
- (i) the re-equipment of certain bomber squadrons in Egypt, Kenya and Iraq with modern aircraft.
  - (ii) arrangements have been made to ensure that any troops which may be despatched to Palestine ~~to~~ Egypt will be immediately replaced from elsewhere. In addition, the Government of India have been requested to treat the despatch of a brigade to Egypt as having first priority over all other reinforcement commitments which they have provisionally accepted.
  - (iii) the General Officer Commanding British Troops in Egypt has been authorised to encourage any proposal which may be put to him by the Egyptian Government to re-occupy Mersa Matruh with Egyptian troops.
- (e) We recommend that the following additional measures should be taken:—
- (i) The Air Officer Commanding, Middle East, should be authorised to establish petrol and bomb dumps in the Western Desert on the understanding that he and the General Officer Commanding are satisfied as to their security.
  - (ii) The anti-torpedo nets now in S.S. *Thistlegarth* at Alexandria should be disembarked and stored ashore at Alexandria if this can be arranged.
  - (iii) That in principle it is very desirable that the guns and lights now in S.S. *Thistlegarth* should be transferred to the Egyptian authorities as soon as possible and mounted at Alexandria. If, however, in the opinion of the local authorities, we should by such action lose a valuable bargaining factor in connection with negotiations concerning harbour improvements and the provision of a dock at Alexandria, the guns should in any case be landed and stored at Alexandria.
  - (iv) The guns and lights for the defence of Canal Terminal ports now stored at Malta should be stored in Egypt if this can be arranged.
  - (v) The ammunition for the gun defences of Alexandria now in S.S. *Churruca* should be disembarked and stored in Egypt.

(Signed) CHATFIELD.  
C. J. DEVERELL.  
C. L. NEWALL.

2 Whitehall Gardens, S.W. 1,  
October 26, 1937.

## ANNEX I.

[C.O.S. 631.]

## Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee.

SITUATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND MIDDLE EAST.  
(Previous Paper No. C.O.S. 630.)

## Report.

AT our 218th Meeting on the 18th October, 1937, we had under consideration two telegrams from the Naval Commander-in-chief, Mediterranean, dated the 16th October, 1937, addressed to the Chief of Naval Staff, and a telegram from His Majesty's Chargé d'Affaires, Egypt, addressed to the Foreign Office of the same date (attached as Enclosures Nos. 1, 2 and 3).

The local Commanders of the three Services (who are at present assembled in Egypt under instructions of the Chiefs of Staff to examine detailed plans, based on the assumption of a single-handed war with Italy), have expressed concern at the deterioration in the international situation, and, in particular, at the despatch of Italian troops to Libya, and the intention of the Italian Government to appoint Signor Parini as the Italian Minister in Egypt. They propose certain immediate measures to strengthen our position in Egypt, which may be briefly summarised as follows:—

- (i) The despatch of a complete anti-aircraft brigade, and preferably of a fighter squadron in addition, from the United Kingdom.
- (ii) The despatch of the aircraft carrier H.M.S. *Glorious* to Alexandria or the retention of her aircraft there.
- (iii) To approach the Egyptian Government with a view to an immediate move of Egyptian troops to Mersa Matruh, and the establishment of net defences and the mounting of guns at Alexandria.
- (iv) The authorisation of the General Officer Commanding to move British troops to Mersa Matruh and Suez at his discretion, and the placing of Mersa Matruh in a state of defence by the building-up of reserves of stores and the supply of anti-gas and water supply equipment.
- (v) The establishment of dumps of petrol and bombs for Air Forces operating in the Western Desert.
- (vi) The placing of a squadron in Iraq at short notice to reinforce Egypt.

We are sympathetic towards the anxieties of the local Commanders charged with the responsibility of the security of Egypt in view of the existing paucity of resources available in that country. In particular, the provision of anti-aircraft defences and fighter aircraft, all of which are at present deficient, appears to us to be eminently desirable in principle with a view to the establishment of confidence in Egypt and the stabilisation of the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In this connection the proposal of the Commander-in-chief, Mediterranean, to land aircraft from *Glorious* in Egypt is not recommended as apart from administrative objections it is most undesirable to use up these ship-based aircraft against much faster and more heavily armed land-based aircraft. *Glorious* is also due for refit and recommissioning. The dockyard programme has been adjusted to take her in hand shortly, and the crew, having completed their term of foreign service, are expecting to return to the United Kingdom this month. Her retention could only be justified on the grounds that it was necessary for the Mediterranean Fleet to be at more immediate state of readiness for war against Italy.

It will be observed that the recommendations of the local Commanders are based on their assumption that the international situation has considerably deteriorated during the last few days.

From the purely strategic point of view we do not consider that the military situation has greatly changed from that which existed at the end of July. It will be recalled that at the 4th Meeting of the Defence Plans (Policy) Sub-Committee on the 23rd July, 1937, the Prime Minister emphasised the importance of doing "nothing which could arouse Italian suspicions, or be construed as

provocative." It was on this account that the Admiralty were authorised to despatch to the Mediterranean the nets, which would be required at Alexandria in the event of an emergency, and an ammunition ship, on the distinct understanding that these steps were to be taken as unobtrusively as possible. At the 298th Meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence on the 29th July, 1937, the War Office were similarly authorised to take immediate but unobtrusive steps to build up their reserves of supplies and stores so as to enable the garrison of Egypt to operate for a period of two months.

These measures were taken largely as a result of the announced intention of the Italians to despatch three Metropolitan Divisions to Libya as part of its permanent garrison. This announcement by Italy had been made as long ago as the 10th April last. The only new factor which has arisen is that instead of the permanent garrison of Libya being one white corps of three Divisions, it now appears that it is to consist of two Corps, each of two Divisions. The total numbers of white troops in Libya, however, will not greatly exceed the combined total of the three Divisions whose despatch was originally announced, and the white troops which were already present in the country.

There are two more reasons why it appears to us unnecessary to view with undue alarm this divergence from Italy's original announcement as to her intentions regarding the strength of the garrison in Libya. In the first place it has been stated that the troops in Libya, owing to the favourable training facilities afforded by the colony, are to be considered in future as part of the Metropolitan Army, and we see no reason for not accepting this statement. In the second place, as far as our information goes, the formations now arriving in Libya are not up to strength nor equipped for major operations over a difficult terrain such as would be involved in a land attack upon Egypt. The only forces immediately available for attack upon Egypt would therefore be air forces, which are not at present stationed in Libya in sufficient force for the purpose, though they could be flown there very rapidly and aerodromes exist for their accommodation. Aggression by air forces unsupported by ground troops seems to us extremely unlikely.

As regards the political situation, we are informed that the Foreign Office consider that a general increase in tension in the Mediterranean has taken place during the last two months, due to developments in connection with the Spanish situation. The purely political aspects of this question are not matters which are within our province, but we presume that the situation in the Mediterranean is likely to develop one way or the other as the result of meetings of the Committee on Non-Intervention in Spain, which are now taking place.

If the negotiations in that Committee proceed satisfactorily, it appears to us that there may be a considerable relaxation in the tension between ourselves and Italy. If, on the other hand, the negotiations break down, Italy may become apprehensive of stronger and more positive action on the part of ourselves, acting in co-operation with the French. In this case she might conceivably take anticipatory counter-measures by playing upon our fears for the security of Egypt. Indications have not been lacking that she is well aware of our sensitiveness in this quarter since any sign of an intention to increase the garrison of Libya has always provoked an immediate reaction on our part.

In this connection it must be remembered that the despatch of Italian troops to Libya is a cause of anxiety to the French no less than to ourselves, since their colony of Tunis no less than Egypt can be threatened from Libya. The recent transfer of Italian troops from the Yugoslav to the French frontier may well have been part of the same policy.

At the same time, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that Italy herself has her own anxieties and difficulties. Serious disturbances have recently taken place in Abyssinia where she has at the present time some 70,000 troops at the end of a very vulnerable line of communication. In Spain she has some 45,000 troops committed at the present time. Her internal economic and financial situation must give rise to serious concern. In these circumstances, from a military point of view, it seems improbable that she would embark single-handed on offensive action directed against Egypt, particularly in view of the fact that her ground forces in Libya are at present unprepared for an operation of such magnitude and that the only immediate action which she could take would be from the air.

So far we have been considering only the situation as it is affected by our direct relations with Italy and the immediate defence of Egypt against Italian

aggression. These considerations, however, cannot be dissociated from the general international situation. The transfer of any forces from this country must inevitably weaken our position *vis-à-vis* Germany. The despatch of 24 guns and 24 searchlights to Egypt would at this moment reduce the number of guns and lights available for the anti-aircraft defence of the United Kingdom to 188 guns and 806 lights. If by any action on our part we should provoke an act of sudden aggression against us by Italy in the Mediterranean we should have to face the possibility of Germany (whether by preconcerted collusion or otherwise) seizing the opportunity to pursue her ambitions in other parts of Europe, thus possibly precipitating a world-wide war. This possibility must always remain our greatest danger, and we have always considered that we should take no action which would result in a diversion of our limited resources from our main objective, which is the security of this country against German aggression. This consideration applies with especial force at the present time when our total defensive resources are still far below the level required for fulfilment of our defensive liabilities. Consequently the decision whether or not to strengthen our anti-aircraft defences in Egypt depends largely on whether the Government consider that the risk of an extension of trouble from the Mediterranean to Northern Europe can be disregarded.

It is for this reason that we have frequently referred to the desirability, from the military point of view, of the restoration of our former friendly relations with Italy. In July 1936, for example, we reported\* as follows:—

“From the strategical point of view the first desideratum is a secure Mediterranean. This involves, as the primary consideration, the restoration of our former friendly relations with Italy.”

Again, the Review of Imperial Defence† which we prepared in February 1937, for use at the Imperial Conference, included the following passages:—

\* \* \* \* \*

“Better relations with Italy should be our constant aim.”

and later in the Review:—

\* \* \* \* \*

“Thus, our sea communication through the Mediterranean can only be made really secure, either by maintaining friendship with Italy, or by establishing ourselves in such military strength in the Mediterranean as would permanently deter Italy from embarking on war against us.”

\* \* \* \* \*

In a recent report on Anglo-Italian relations‡ we stated with regard to the above quotations:—

“We have been reinforced in the convictions expressed in the above quotations by the detailed examinations which we have recently conducted into plans for possible wars. The result of these examinations has been to make it abundantly clear that the embarrassments and dangers to which we should be exposed, in the event of war with either Germany or Japan, will be multiplied by the possibility of a hostile Italy.”

We have despatched an interim reply to the telegrams from the Naval Commander-in-Chief dated the 16th October, a copy of which is attached as Enclosure 4 to this Report.

We now ask for an early decision as to whether any action should be taken to carry out the recommendation of the local Commanders. In this connection the time factor is all important. From the time when a decision is taken to despatch reinforcements from this country to the time when their presence will become effective in Egypt, a period of about six weeks must be allowed. This factor particularly affects the first of the recommendations of the local Commanders that an anti-aircraft brigade should be despatched from this country. The other measures proposed are concerned with forces and resources available in or near Egypt at the present time, and could be implemented more rapidly.

\* Enclosure 2 to C.I.D. Paper No. 1261-B, paragraph 4 (a).

† C.I.D. Paper No. 1305-B, paragraphs 30 and 67.

‡ C.I.D. Paper No. 1347-B, paragraph 5.



*Summary and Conclusions.*

Our conclusions may be summed up as follows:—

- (i) The provision of fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft defences in Egypt is in itself eminently desirable and would be a valuable factor in establishing confidence in Egypt and stabilising the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, but in present conditions cannot be considered independently of the international situation as a whole.
- (ii) From a purely military point of view, we are aware of no new factor in the situation which leads us to consider that the military situation is such as to justify a change in our existing instructions that no obtrusive measures should be taken in connection with the defence of Egypt or in the projected movements of the Fleet.
- (iii) We note the opinion of the Foreign Office that the political situation in the Mediterranean at the present time is such as to justify further measures to increase the security of Egypt against Italian aggression. But we presume that the position is likely to develop one way or the other as the result of the meetings of the Committee on Non-Intervention in Spain now in progress.
- (iv) Italy's present commitments and pre-occupations in Abyssinia and in Spain, her adverse economic and financial position and the unpreparedness of her ground forces in Libya, at the present time, for offensive operations in the Western Desert, make it improbable that she would embark single-handed on offensive action directed against Egypt.
- (v) The despatch of any forces from this country must inevitably weaken our position *vis-à-vis* Germany, and we have always considered that we should take no action which would result in a diversion of our limited resources from our main objective, which is the security of this country against German aggression.
- (vi) We have despatched an interim reply to the Local Commanders-in-Chief in Egypt (Enclosure No. 4), but a decision of the Cabinet is now required on the following points:—
  - (a) Has the political situation *vis-à-vis* Italy deteriorated at the present time, or is it likely to do so in the immediate future as a result of a breakdown in the negotiations of the Committee on Non-Intervention in Spain, to such an extent as to warrant a departure from our present instructions for taking no obtrusive measures for the additional security of Egypt?
  - (b) If the above is the case—
    - (1) should authority be given to the Local Commanders to take all the measures possible with the existing resources in or near Egypt, *i.e.*, those referred to in Paragraph 2 (ii) to (vi) above;
    - (2) should forces be despatched from the United Kingdom at the cost of weakening our anti-aircraft defence at home in the event of German aggression or an extension of trouble in the Mediterranean to northern Europe in such degree as to menace the United Kingdom?
- (vii) From the time when a decision is taken to despatch reinforcements from this country to the time when their presence will become effective in Egypt, a period, in time of peace, of about six weeks must be allowed.

(Signed)

CHATFIELD.

R. H. HAINING  
(for C.I.G.S.).

R. E. C. PIERSE  
(for C.A.S.).

2 Whitehall Gardens, S.W. 1,  
October 19, 1937.

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## ENCLOSURE NO. 1 TO ANNEX I.

*Copy of a Telegram from the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean (No. 127), dated October 16, 1937, to the Admiralty.*

PERSONAL for First Sea Lord and for C.I.G.S. and C.A.S.

2. Local Commanders held their first meeting this Saturday forenoon and were in agreement that as international situation appeared to have deteriorated considerably during last few days it was desirable that a report should be made now on steps which should be taken immediately to strengthen armament position *vis-à-vis* Italy should His Majesty's Government be in agreement with our appreciation of the situation.

3. We are aware that the policy of His Majesty's Government has been that German menace has been considered greater than that from Italy, but it is for consideration whether Italian attitude generally, the massing of troops in Libya and information contained in telegrams Nos. 552 and 555 from British Minister to Mr. Eden do not at least temporarily call for special measures being undertaken for the defence of Egypt.

4. The outstanding deficiency is the total absence of anti-aircraft guns and searchlights in either Egypt or Palestine, and we would urge most strongly that a complete anti-aircraft brigade should be sent out now.

5. *Naval Situation.*—The present distribution of ships is generally favourable for opening moves as set forth in Interim appreciation J.P. 233. If H.M.S. *Repulse* were sent to Gibraltar the two Battle Cruisers, one Mediterranean and one Home Fleet Flotilla would be available for escorting H.M.S. *Furious* with fighter aircraft for Egypt. The remaining forces in Aegean could be moved to Egypt for protection of Canal and Alexandria. Net defences in British ship *Thistlethorpe* and H.M.S. *Protector* and ammunition in A.S.I.S. *Churruca* are now in Eastern Mediterranean.

6. The question of H.M.S. *Glorious* requires immediate consideration. The present arrangement is that H.M.S. *Glorious* should leave Malta for United Kingdom on the 25th October with three Torpedo Spotter Reconnaissance and all her fighter aircraft, the remainder being disembarked at Malta. If the situation is considered serious, it is recommended that H.M.S. *Glorious* should proceed to Alexandria forthwith, which would allow two alternatives, according to development of the situation. (a) If delay in arrival of H.M.S. *Glorious* in United Kingdom can be accepted, then H.M.S. *Glorious* should retain her aircraft on board. (b) If H.M.S. *Glorious* must adhere to her present programme, then all her aircraft to be disembarked in Egypt. If the latter course were adopted the air situation might be further strengthened by sending out H.M.S. *Courageous* to replace H.M.S. *Glorious*.

7. *Military Situation.*—As regards precautionary measures on land the General Officer Commanding is of opinion that, in view of changed situation in Italian preparations in Libya, paragraph 26 of Appendix A to General Staff War Office Note No. 1 on the situation in the Middle East in the event of a unilateral war with Italy and importance of forestalling the Italians at Matruh, the following immediate action should be taken.

8. Firstly, he should be given authority to approach Egyptian Government in conjunction with Embassy with a view to (a) moving forthwith Egyptian troops as garrison to Matruh in order to restore and maintain defences at that place, (b) obtain their agreement to establishment of coast defences ex *Thistlethorpe* at Alexandria. Secondly, he should be given authority to move British troops to Matruh and Suez at his discretion and to establish at once at former place a depot to contain approximately 14 days' supplies and stores of all natures. Thirdly, he considered immediate despatch of anti-gas stores and of at least one portable distilling plant for use at Matruh to be essential.

9. *Air Situation.*—An essential emergency precaution is to lay down supplies of petrol and bombs in western desert. Air Officer Commanding Middle East requests authority to proceed at once with construction of dumps, starting at Mersa Matruh.

10. In view of deterioration in the Palestine situation with the possibility of having to reinforce that country by numbers 6 and 33 squadrons Air Officer Commanding Middle East considers one Vincent Squadron in Iraq should now be placed at short notice to reinforce Egypt.

11. Concerning proposal to garrison searchlights and anti-aircraft guns referred to in paragraph 4 above, it would be most advantageous to have one fighter squadron sent to Egypt before outbreak of hostilities.

12. A copy of this telegram has been handed to British Minister, who is telegraphing his views to Foreign Office. 1603/16.

ENCLOSURE No. 2 TO ANNEX I.

*Copy of a telegram from the Commander-in-chief, Mediterranean (No./30), dated October 16, 1937, to the Admiralty.*

PERSONAL for First Sea Lord.

When we commenced our discussion this morning there was a general feeling that international situation might develop unfavourably in the near future, and it soon became apparent that there was a considerable state of unpreparedness in certain directions. I therefore suggested, and General Officer Commanding and Air Officer Commanding concurred, that it was desirable to suggest certain immediate action as contained in my 1603 16th October. We are now considering interim appreciation J.P. 233, but it was immediately apparent that it was essential to have much more detailed information than that available here as to what fast and slow convoy transports contain. General Officer Commanding has wired to War Office for the information which I hope will be sent immediately, as otherwise our deliberations will be held up. First Lord has seen my 1603 16th October.—0003/17.

ENCLOSURE No. 3 TO ANNEX I.

*Copy of a Telegram from Mr. Kelly (Alexandria) (No. 568), dated October 16, 1937, to the Foreign Office.*

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF'S most secret telegram to Chiefs of Staff, the 16th October.

I very strongly support general principle underlying service recommendations, namely, that any measures contemplated for serious emergency should be anticipated as far as possible and as soon as possible.

2. I consider specific proposals in Commander-in-chief's telegram should present no local political difficulty, though I understand proposed anti-aircraft units and pilots for additional aircraft might increase total personnel of land and air forces respectively above treaty limits.

3. Should this be so, there are two courses open: (a) if excess is very small, say nothing to Egyptians; (b) if excess is important, inform the Egyptian Government of measures in progress, stating if circumstances require that, in opinion of His Majesty's Government, apprehended international emergency exists.

4. From various recent conversations with Makram and Nahas Pasha I feel they are in a mood in which they are unlikely to raise objections. If we adopt course (a) and the Egyptian Government themselves enquire what is numerical effect of reinforcements when they arrive, I should admit the fact after verification, but say excess was so trifling that it had not been realised.

5. As regards movement of Egyptian troops to Mersa Matruh referred to in paragraph 8, Nahas Pasha informed me at lunch to-day that head of military mission had this morning advised the Minister of War in the same sense. Prime Minister said he approved, but desired opinion of the General Officer

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to Mersa Matruh, he should give every encouragement to the proposal, but the movements of British troops suggested in this paragraph should not take place without further reference to the War Office.

6. As regards paragraph 8 (b), no action should be taken to approach the Egyptian Government regarding coast defences ex *Thistlethorpe*, since these may be a useful bargaining counter in negotiations for dock at Alexandria.

7. Reference paragraphs 10 and 11 of Commander-in-chief's telegram, the Chiefs of Staff cannot authorise the proposals of Air Officer Commanding, Middle East.

8. Further consideration is being given by the Committee of Imperial Defence to the remaining proposals contained in Commander-in-chief's telegram, and a further telegram will be sent in due course.

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*Printed for the Committee of Imperial Defence. October 1937.*

SECRET.

Copy No. 41

# COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE.

*Extract from the DRAFT Minutes of the 300th Meeting, held on October 28, 1937.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## (6)—SITUATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND MIDDLE EAST.

EGYPT, CYPRUS, MALTA (PROPOSED BATTALIONS).

(C.I.D. Paper No. 1364-B.)

(Previous Reference : C.I.D. Minutes of the 299th Meeting, Minute 6 : also for Egypt, 298th Meeting Minute 1; for Cyprus, 294th Meeting, Minute 4.)

THE COMMITTEE had under consideration a Report by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee on the situation in the Mediterranean and the Middle East (C.I.D. Paper No. 1364-B).

LORD CHATFIELD, introducing the Report at the request of the Chairman, began by recalling the course of events which had led up to its preparation.

The Chiefs of Staff had been instructed by the Cabinet to consider what steps of a military character could be taken with a view to increasing our prestige in the Near and Middle East, and their views were summarised in paragraph 23 of the Report under consideration. As stated in paragraph 6, the Chiefs of Staff emphasised the deplorable military position existing in Egypt at the present time. There were no anti-aircraft defences or fighter aircraft at present in that country and no reinforcements could reach Egypt in under six weeks after the outbreak of war, and very few even then within that period. The measures which the Chiefs of Staff now recommended should be taken were referred to in paragraphs 13 to 20 of the Report and summarised in paragraph 23 (e).

THE CHAIRMAN said that the Cabinet, at their meeting the previous day, had reached the following conclusion\* regarding certain of the measures referred to in the Report of the Chiefs of Staff :—

“ that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should be authorised to instruct the Chargé d’Affaires in Egypt to express his concurrence in proposals by the Egyptian Government for military defensive precautions inside Egypt such as moving Egyptian (but not British) troops and stores to Mersa Metruh and the formation of dumps of stores and munitions at convenient points.”

MR. DUFF COOPER said that, as a result of his recent visit to the Mediterranean, he had returned with similar feelings as his predecessor had expressed after a similar visit, regarding the deficiencies in our military preparations in that area. It would be noted that in their telegram dated the 16th October, 1937 (Enclosure No. 1 to Annex No. 1) the Local Commanders considered that the situation had deteriorated and that certain steps should be taken immediately to strengthen our position *vis-à-vis* Italy. In paragraph 2 (iii)

\* Cabinet 39 (37), Minute 5.

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\* Cabinet 39 (37), Minute 5.

of the Report by the Chiefs of Staff note was taken of the opinion of the Foreign Office that the political situation in the Mediterranean at the present time was such as to justify further measures to increase the security of Egypt against Italian aggression. The proposals by the Chiefs of Staff now before the Committee hardly seemed in keeping with the views on the situation expressed by the Local Commanders and by the Foreign Office. It seemed unsound to allow day-to-day changes in our relations *vis-à-vis* Italy to affect our policy. It had been suggested that there were only two alternatives open to us, either to make friends with Italy and to take no obtrusive steps for improving our defences or to abandon our attempts to improve our relations with Italy, but to strengthen our military position as rapidly as possible. A more satisfactory course seemed to be for us to make friends with Italy and at the same time to do everything we could to strengthen our military position in the Mediterranean. In this connection unobtrusive measures would have little value, and we should be far more likely to impress Italy by taking overt measures for improving our military position. It appeared, moreover, that a unilateral war with Italy was unlikely since it was most improbable that Mussolini would venture on hostilities unless certain of the support of Germany. It seemed, therefore, a mistaken policy to conclude that we must do nothing which would weaken our position at Home *vis-à-vis* Germany, since anything which we could do to improve our military strength in the Mediterranean would also, indirectly, improve our position against Germany. The Egyptian Authorities had shown themselves particularly well disposed towards us at the present time and were keenly alive to the Italian menace. Nahas Pasha and Makram Pasha, in the course of conversation, had intimated that no reasonable financial considerations would debar the Egyptian Government from improving the defence of their country once they knew what was required of them. In addition to the measures proposed by the Chiefs of Staff in the Report it seemed desirable that we should hasten negotiations with the Egyptian Government regarding the establishment of a Naval Base at Alexandria. An early decision on the future of Cyprus was also required. We might, moreover, request the Governor and Commander-in-chief at Malta to give the views of the three Service Commanders as to the requirements for the defence of that fortress, including the cost involved. There was at present complete agreement between the three Services on the spot on this question and, if requested, the Governor would render a Report at very short notice.

THE CHAIRMAN observed that an Inter-Service Report on the defence requirements of Malta had already been received and was now under consideration by the Joint Overseas and Home Defence Sub-Committee.

LORD SWINTON said that important political issues had been raised by the First Lord of the Admiralty.

It was, of course, true that all three Services were anxious to have complete security both at Home and in the Mediterranean. As far as Air Forces were concerned, and apart from a programme of aircraft re-equipment in the Middle East now in progress, it would be impossible materially to strengthen our position in Egypt without weakening the Air Forces available at Home for defence against Germany. The Chiefs of Staff had recommended that any increase which might be made to our military strength in Egypt should be limited to what could be done without weakening ourselves at Home *vis-à-vis* Germany. He (Lord Swinton) could not share the view expressed by the First Lord that by strengthening our forces in the Mediterranean we should at the same time be strengthening ourselves against Germany. The Prime Minister had laid down that our main preoccupation should be the building up of our defensive position at Home. The stronger we were against Germany, the less likelihood there was of Italy embarking in war against us.

SIR ROBERT VANSITTART agreed and said that opinions in some quarters inclined to the view that it would be to the interest of Germany to embroil us with Italy in the Mediterranean, and then seize the opportunity of embarking on some venture in Central Europe.

SIR JOHN SIMON said that the political aspect of the Mediterranean situation had recently been brought before the Cabinet. The Local Commanders, in their telegram dated the 16th October, had expressed the view that the political

situation " appeared to have deteriorated considerably during the last few days." These views, and the measures which they had proposed to improve our military position, had been considered by the Chiefs of Staff, who had meanwhile sent a reassuring telegram to the Local Commanders (Enclosure No. 4 to Annex I), in which they stated: " The Chiefs of Staff do not consider military situation has become more serious during the last two months."

LORD CHATFIELD recalled that before the Recess the Prime Minister had called for an investigation as to what measures it would be necessary to take in the Mediterranean in anticipation of a possible rapid deterioration of the situation during the holidays. The decision then taken had been that nothing obtrusive was to be done. The Admiralty and the War Office had, however, been authorised to take certain steps, and these, in fact, had been carried out. Although the Chiefs of Staff viewed with concern the existing lack of defences in Egypt, nothing had occurred since the examination of the position in July to warrant the opinion that the military situation had deteriorated.

THE CHAIRMAN remarked that the Cabinet were now asking the Chiefs of Staff what steps, if any, could be taken which would demonstrate that we, as well as other countries, could make a show of military strength. The recommendations by the Chiefs of Staff now before the Committee were not related to the general question of strengthening our position in the Mediterranean and Middle East. To say that by strengthening our position in the Mediterranean we were, at the same time, also improving our position at Home against Germany was true only if we had sufficient resources to meet our commitments in both these areas. This was unfortunately not the case.

SIR ROBERT VANSITTART suggested that the Foreign Office should consult His Majesty's Chargé d'Affaires in Egypt as to the advisability of using the proposal for transferring 6-inch guns to the Egyptian Authorities as a bargaining factor in connection with negotiations concerning harbour improvements and the provision of a dock at Alexandria, as referred to in paragraph 23 (iii). Having in mind the present accommodating attitude of the Egyptian Authorities towards us, this line of approach might be deemed by the Chargé d'Affaires to be inappropriate at the present moment and liable to cause offence to the Egyptians.

LORD CHATFIELD said that the provision of a dock at Alexandria was a most important question, upon which a decision regarding the establishment of docking and repair facilities at Cyprus would depend.

Mr. DUFF COOPER suggested that the present attitude of the Egyptian Government afforded a favourable opportunity for pressing on with these important negotiations.

SIR ROBERT VANSITTART suggested that authority might be given to the General Officer Commanding to move British Troops to Mersa Matruh at his discretion.

SIR CYRIL DEVERELL said that the movement of British Troops to the Western Desert was not favoured by the Egyptian Authorities. Mersa Matruh, where British Troops had been stationed in great discomfort during the Abyssinian crisis for nearly a year, was an unsatisfactory place for our Troops. In emergency these could be moved there very quickly either by railway or motor transport.

LORD SWINTON suggested that the present time might be favourable for re-opening with the Egyptian Authorities the question of the strength of our garrison and air forces now limited by the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. The situation might arise when we might have to despatch one or even two battalions from Egypt. Moreover, we were at present debarred from establishing a strategical air reserve in that country. It might now be possible to induce the Egyptian Government to offer us more facilities.

SIR ROBERT VANSITTART was inclined to favour the proposal. Referring to paragraph 8 of the telegram from the Local Commanders (Enclosure No. 1 to Annex I); he suggested that authority should be given to establish at Mersa Matruh a dépôt containing approximately 14 days' supplies.

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SIR CYRIL DEVERELL said that there were no objections to the establishment of 14 days' supplies at Mersa Matruh as suggested. If the proposals now put forward were approved, the intention was to build up Mersa Matruh as a defended base which would be manned by Egyptian Troops, who would probably welcome the opportunity of doing something on their own account.

LORD ZETLAND said that he wished to sound a note of caution regarding the question of the reinforcement of Egypt from India. It would be recalled that the Committee of Imperial Defence at their Meeting\* held on the 29th July, had agreed—

“To invite the Secretary of State for India to inform the Government of India that, for the time being, reinforcements for Egypt should be given priority over all other reinforcement commitments which the Government of India have conditionally accepted.”

The Government of India had been duly informed accordingly, but since then the first priority accorded to Egypt had gone by the board, and Indian reinforcements had been sent to the Far East. Provided that no further demands arose from that direction and the situation in India itself did not deteriorate, it would still be possible to despatch the reinforcements to Egypt as originally contemplated. If, however, further demands were made for the despatch of troops to the Far East, or there were trouble in India, it might not be possible to meet a sudden commitment in Egypt.

SIR MAURICE HANKEY enquired whether the anti-gas stores and distilling plant for use at Mersa Matruh, referred to in paragraph 8 of the Local Commanders' telegram of the 16th October, had been despatched.

MR. HORE-BELISHA replied that some of these stores had already been despatched, and the remainder were now being sent.

SIR MAURICE HANKEY asked whether the decision regarding the measures to be taken should be communicated to the Local Commanders in the form of an order, or as giving the latter authority to take the necessary steps at their own discretion.

THE CHAIRMAN replied that instructions should be made permissive within the discretion of the Local Commanders.

MR. HORE-BELISHA said that, while he appreciated that it would be unsound to denude Great Britain of anti-aircraft defences for the benefit of Egypt, the anti-aircraft position in that country remained most unsatisfactory. In reviewing our general position regarding defence against air attack, it might be possible to include consideration of the position in Egypt.

SIR COSMO PARKINSON said that the Secretary of State for the Colonies much regretted his inability to be present at the meeting. The Secretary of State had wished to put forward a proposal regarding Cyprus apart from that of the establishment of a naval base. The question of raising a Cypriot battalion had first been put forward in 1936 and although the War Office had at that time not favoured the project, it had been raised again and the War Office were now re-examining the question. Although the Colony would not be able to sustain the cost, any local battalion which might be raised would be available for service outside Cyprus in an emergency. Moreover, Cyprus offered a good potential recruiting ground.

MR. HORE-BELISHA said that the question raised by Sir Cosmo Parkinson and also the question of raising a Maltese battalion were now under consideration by the Army Council. It was most desirable in principle to use all the available man-power in the Empire. Moreover, such a measure as now proposed would prevent young Cypriots and Maltese from joining Fascist or Communist Organisations. Since the Army Council now had the matter under consideration, it did not seem that anything further could be usefully done at the present time within the Committee of Imperial Defence.

\* C.I.D. 298th Meeting, Minute 1 (iii).

## CONCLUSIONS.

## THE COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE agreed—

- (a) To accord general approval to the Report by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee on the military measures which might be taken at the present time with a view to increasing our prestige in the Near and Middle East (C.I.D. Paper No. 1364-B);
- (b) To take note of the following conclusion recorded by the Cabinet at their Meeting\* held on the 27th October:—

“That the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should be authorised to instruct the Chargé d’Affaires in Egypt to express his concurrence with proposals by the Egyptian Government for military defensive precautions inside Egypt, such as moving Egyptian (but not British) troops and stores to Mersa Matruh and the formation of dumps of stores and munitions at convenient points”;

- (c) To request the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to instruct the Chargé d’Affaires in Egypt to take up the following specific questions with the Egyptian Government as soon as possible:—
  - (i) The disembarkation and storage ashore at Alexandria of the anti-torpedo nets now in S.S. *Thistlegarth*;
  - (ii) The transfer of the coast defence guns and searchlights now in S.S. *Thistlegarth* to the Egyptian Authorities with a view to their installation in due course at Alexandria and ultimate manning by Egyptian personnel as soon as the latter can be trained. In this connection His Majesty’s Chargé d’Affaires should also be requested to advise whether or not it would be appropriate at the present time, in view of the existing accommodating attitude of the Egyptian Government, to use the transfer of the guns and searchlights as a bargaining factor in connection with negotiations concerning harbour improvements and the provision of a dock at Alexandria;
  - (iii) The storage in Egypt of 4—6-inch guns, 6 searchlights, and the necessary ammunition at present held at Malta for the defence of the Canal terminal ports. Since no part of the Suez Canal Defence Plan has yet been divulged to the Egyptian Government, no indication of the intending use of this equipment should be given at this juncture, and it should be alluded to as reserve equipment for British Forces in Egypt. For a similar reason, it would be more appropriate for the equipment to be stored at Alexandria than the otherwise more satisfactory Suez Canal area.
  - (iv) The disembarkation and storage in Egypt of ammunition for the gun defences of Alexandria now in S.S. *Churrucha*;
  - (v) The restoration of the defences at Mersa Matruh, including the repair of the harbour facilities.
- (d) To invite the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to consider whether the present time was favourable for re-opening with the Egyptian Authorities the question of the strength of our garrison in Egypt, with a view to requesting the Egyptian Government to offer us more facilities than we at present enjoy under the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty;
- (e) With regard to paragraphs 8 and 9 of the telegram from the Local Commanders in Egypt, dated the 16th October, 1937 (Enclosure No. 1 to Annex I)—
  - (i) The War Office should give the General Officer Commanding British Troops in Egypt discretion to establish at Mersa Matruh a depot containing approximately 14 days’ supplies and stores of all natures;

\* Cabinet 39 (37), Minute 5.

- (ii) The Air Ministry should give the Air Officer Commanding, Middle East, discretion to establish petrol and bomb dumps in the Western Desert, on the understanding that he and the General Officer Commanding are satisfied as to their security;
- (f) To take note that the anti-gas stores and portable distilling plant for use at Mersa Matruh, referred to in paragraph 8 of the telegram from the Local Commanders, dated the 16th October, 1937, have been despatched by the War Office;
- (g) To take note that the questions of raising Cypriot and Maltese battalions are under consideration by the Army Council;
- (h) To take note that the existing unsatisfactory situation arising from the lack of any anti-aircraft defences in Egypt at the present time would be taken into consideration when our A.A. defences as a whole are reviewed;
- (i) To take note of the *caveat* by the Secretary of State for India that the despatch of reinforcements to Egypt, to the extent originally agreed upon,\* *i.e.*, one brigade, was now conditional on there being no further demand for reinforcements for the Far East, and no deterioration of the situation in India itself;
- (j) That the Chiefs of Staff's Report (C.I.D. Paper No. 1364-B), together with the foregoing record of the discussion thereon, should be submitted to the Cabinet.

\* \* \* \* \*

2 Whitehall Gardens, S.W. 1,  
October 28, 1937.

\* C.I.D. 298th Meeting, Minute 1 (ii).